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ABSTRACT

The Annie E. Casey Foundation's fourth conference occurred as the Foundation launched a new neighborhood transformation and family development strategy centered on strengthening families. This conference summary presents discussions of the major themes from the conference. Section 1, "Understanding the Connection between Families and Communities," explores how neighborhood resources and characteristics can impact a family's efforts to raise its children. Section 2, "Evaluating Initiatives That Strengthen Families and Build Communities," describes the challenges facing evaluators of neighborhood- and family-building initiatives, the issues involved in providing technical assistance on evaluation, and tactics for presenting data in useful and compelling ways. Section 3, "Lessons for Future Initiatives and Evaluations," concludes the summary with lessons and recommendations proposed by the participants. Appendixes contain the conference agenda, transcripts of two keynote addresses, and a list of participants. The keynote addresses (not titled) were by Angela Blackwell and Felton Earls. (SLD)

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transforming neighborhoods into family-supporting environments: EVALUATION ISSUES AND CHALLENGES

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Research and Evaluation at The Annie E. Casey Foundation

The Annie E. Casey Foundation's mission, motivation, and message to the world is its commitment to changing and improving life outcomes for our most disadvantaged children and families. That belief is rooted in the conviction that outcomes for children will not improve without fundamental, comprehensive, and durable changes in many service and support systems. Current health, education, juvenile justice, and other delivery systems for disadvantaged children and families too often are fragmented, inaccessible, expensive, and irrelevant. They frequently fail to deliver essential services until it is too late, contributing to an overall level of ineffectiveness and to an intergenerational cycle of poverty.

The Foundation operates on the premise that these conditions can be reversed—that communities can prosper, families can thrive, and children can develop when neighborhoods are supportive, sustaining, and served by systems that are relevant, respectful, and rooted in the communities that they serve. The Foundation believes that strategic investments in awareness building, capacity development, program demonstrations, and research and evaluation can help move dysfunctional service systems toward greater collaboration, coordination, and flexibility.

In addition to leadership, funding, and other key factors, these changes require accurate, relevant, and compelling information. Research and evaluation are a conduit for information—and information is power. With information on results provided by evaluation, community stakeholders can make better decisions about organizational practices. Similarly, states informed by research and evaluation can make better decisions about the allocation of resources and policies that affect children and families.

Evaluation plays a major role in the Foundation's theory of change, as a tool for:

- Improving accountability: contributing to understanding about the degree to which interventions represent good judgments about the organizations, communities, and people in which the Foundation places its confidence and resources.

- Revealing the soundness of theories, the practicality of policies, the appropriateness of planning timelines, the relevance of technical assistance, and the extent to which the Foundation has established effective partnerships with grantees.

- Informing funders about the viability of working with states, cities, community-based organizations, and child- and family-serving systems to achieve real transformation and reform.

For these reasons, the Casey Foundation believes that research and evaluation can, should, and must be a critical and integral component of comprehensive reform strategies.

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Conference Overview

The Annie E. Casey Foundation continued its dialogue about difficult research issues with leaders and evaluators of social interventions at a conference in March 1999. The conference, held in Baltimore, was the fourth in a series of forums offered periodically by the Foundation since 1994 to help identify emerging challenges and explore promising solutions.

The topics of the conferences reflect the Foundation's evolving strategies for improving outcomes for disadvantaged children and families, as well as new developments in the art and science of understanding social change. The first conference focused on issues related to the evaluation of complex public system reform. The second conference addressed ways of using evaluation results more effectively to advance public policy and build public will. The third conference explored the complexities of evaluating comprehensive community change.

The fourth conference occurred as the Foundation launched a new neighborhood transformation and family development strategy, based on the following premises:

- Although good interventions and service systems are important, even the best system-reform initiatives are not powerful enough to leverage all of the change needed to produce better outcomes for children. Children are most likely to do well when they have strong families—families that are resourceful, informed, and able to draw on an array of supportive people, services, and opportunities.

- It is possible to improve outcomes for children by strengthening their families. Families can be strengthened by transforming neighborhoods into places that nurture and support families and reinforce children's chances for success. Neighborhood transformation—community building—involves providing the incentives, investments, and opportunities needed to connect families with jobs, friends and neighbors, faith-based institutions, and other social relationships, networks, and supports.

It is clear to us that when families ... live in places that exacerbate their struggles—places that are perceived to be or are unsafe, places that are prone to extensive drug use and drug commerce, where economic investments are weak, where social supports are fragile ... and where public systems are disproportionately weak—it is easy for even the strongest families to feel compromised and overwhelmed.

—Tony Cipollone
The Annie E. Casey Foundation

The Foundation's investments under this strategy, including the Making Connections demonstration initiative, will seek to build public will, advance public policy, reform public systems, build family-supporting neighborhoods, and strengthen the capacity of practitioners, researchers, and community stakeholders to engage in this work and to use data effectively for strategic analysis and planning.

The 1999 conference was designed to stimulate discussion about several issues that the foundation will need to address in implementing its new strategy. As described by conference host and Director of Evaluation Tony Cipollone, these issues include:

- **Understanding families and neighborhoods**, especially (1) how to define, foster, and measure family strength; (2) how neighborhood resources and characteristics can help or hinder families' efforts to nurture their children; (3) which child and family outcomes are most strongly linked to neighborhood factors; (4) what types of interventions hold the most promise for promoting strong families and children in poor neighborhoods; and (5) how to make family strengthening the core engine and outcome of a comprehensive neighborhood transformation effort

- **Helping communities analyze and use data effectively**, especially when evaluations seek to blend local and national assessments of multi-site initiatives; challenges include identifying outcomes and merging local and national theories of change

- **Accommodating long timeframes for interventions** in ways that support evaluation of long-term endeavors, opportunities to reflect on the appropriateness of strategies and indicators of success, and adherence to core goals and principles over time

- **Maximizing the utility of evaluations**, especially by assessing intangible but important elements such as neighborhood efficacy or empowerment and its impact on child outcomes; challenges include (1) assessing the roles of local and national funders and technical assistance providers, (2) establishing a role for evaluators that makes them useful to sites without compromising their objectivity, and (3) creating products that communicate findings in useful and compelling ways

Cross-Cutting Themes

1. ***The intersection between neighborhood and family is vital to children's well-being, but research on the topic has many gaps.***

Neighborhood and family are not just separate variables in child development; they interact in important ways. Therefore, the relationships between neighborhoods and families—the processes and mechanisms by which one influences the other—ought to command attention from researchers and resources from initiatives. However, researchers do not yet adequately understand how the cultural, racial/ethnic, and ecological characteristics of neighborhoods affect the way in which children experience families and communities at various stages of their development. Nor do social scientists and funders fully understand what mechanisms link families and neighborhoods and which interventions are most promising for developing families and transforming neighborhoods.

2. ***Although research confirms the sense that neighborhood matters to children and families, it offers little guidance on key concerns for policy makers.***

Current research generally does not explain how to help families choose healthy neighborhoods, how to improve existing neighborhoods to better support families and children, or how to help residents of distressed neighborhoods avoid or overcome the problems that surround them. The research base also is sparse regarding neighborhood effects on the development of young children.

3. ***The context and characteristics of neighborhoods influence the outcomes experienced by children and families.***

Initiatives designed to improve outcomes for children need to understand: why neighborhoods and families matter; how families mediate neighborhood influences, and vice versa; and how to introduce, support, and modify crucial neighborhood mechanisms to achieve positive outcomes.

Similarly, researchers must identify the neighborhood's cultural, racial, ecological, and socio-economic variables; incorporate them in analyses; and, in some cases, make them a distinct focus of study. Most current research does not explain which mechanisms are linked to specific outcomes, although some studies have described factors that mediate the way in which residents perceive or experience certain aspects of their neighborhoods.

4. ***Efforts to strengthen families and neighborhoods must do more than simply provide social services or external supports—they must build local capacity for change and the social capital that enables residents to sustain and expand improvements.***

Interventions tend to focus on "fixing" problems rather than on helping people become able to meet their own needs. Real family and community enhancement requires the development of social capital—the resources and opportunities that develop capacity and self-sufficiency in individuals and local institutions.

Many researchers and evaluators are working to better understand how social capital and a community's collective efficacy can strengthen neighborhoods and families and how interventions can stimulate these key qualities of social change. Some interventions—and also some evaluations—use technical assistance to build local capacity. This can be an effective strategy for strengthening individuals and institutions if the technical assistance targets the specific needs and interests of local stakeholders.

5. ***Initiatives that strengthen families and build communities present several challenges for evaluation design and methodology.***

These challenges include: (1) defining the unit of analysis; (2) clarifying the purpose of the evaluation; (3) defining outcomes, indicators, and measures for such concepts as social capital, family strength, community, community efficacy and spirit, and empowerment; (4) measuring processes, interactions, perceptions, and relationships as well as behaviors, activities, and outcomes; (5) timing the start of evaluation activities to ensure smooth data collection and cooperation from local partners; (6) integrating qualitative and quantitative data; (7) presenting data to diverse audiences in useful and compelling ways; and (8), in the case of evaluations that have local and national components, effectively managing both tiers of activity.

This conference summary presents the discussion of these themes and other issues. Section I, *Understanding the Connection between Families and Communities*, tackles the questions, "Does neighborhood matter?" and, "How does neighborhood matter?" Section II, *Evaluating Initiatives that Strengthen Families and Build Communities*, describes the challenges facing evaluators of neighborhood- and family-building initiatives, issues involved in providing technical assistance on evaluation, and tactics for presenting data in useful and compelling ways. Section III, *Lessons for Future Initiatives and Evaluations*, concludes the summary with lessons and recommendations proposed by the participants. Appendices contain the conference agenda, transcripts of two featured speeches, and a list of participants.

Understanding the Connection Between Families and Communities

We know a lot about children and how they develop into young people and adults. We know a thing or two about what makes a family healthy and strong, and perhaps a bit more about the factors that can undermine families. And we know quite a bit about communities and what it takes to make them viable, productive, and nurturing. But what do we really know about the intersection between children, families, and neighborhoods?

Does Neighborhood Matter?

Most Americans assume that growing up in a "bad" neighborhood will somehow jeopardize a child's future. Accordingly, those who can afford to do so choose to live in neighborhoods where their children can attend good schools and be surrounded by neighbors and peers who share their family's goals and values. Although some social scientists contradict this assumption, suggesting that bad outcomes prevail in certain neighborhoods simply because high-risk individuals cluster there, panelist Margery Turner described a consensus among many researchers that neighborhood conditions such as poverty and employment rates do significantly affect a range of outcomes for children and adults, including education, employment, sexual activity, and criminal involvement.

To date, most research on neighborhood effects has focused on adolescents and has not examined the ways in which neighborhood conditions may affect children or influence the way in which children develop into adolescents. Nor has the empirical research provided much evidence of what it is that matters most in neighborhoods or what the mechanisms are by which neighborhood characteristics are translated into outcomes for children and families. Researchers also have not paid much attention to historical and cultural factors and to the combined effect of multiple factors.

Despite these gaps, social researchers are actively constructing theories and concepts of how neighborhoods matter.

How Does Neighborhood Matter?

Conference participants offered several research-based perspectives on how neighborhoods matter, including concepts like social capital, social networks and "embeddedness," and collective efficacy. Participants also identified mechanisms by which neighborhoods can affect child and family well-being and highlighted the importance of neighborhood context in child and family development.

Social Capital

Although the concept of social capital is not new, it has taken on new meanings and importance in research on families and communities. As described by panelist Bill Rohe, social capital refers to the social trust, connections, and norms that enable individuals to collectively pursue shared objectives and solve problems. According to this model, which Rohe used in his research on social capital in Pittsburgh neighborhoods, increasing the amount and

quality of neighborhood interaction, or civic engagement, should (1) increase residents' trust of each other and of local and citywide institutions and (2) build more extensive social networks among neighborhood residents. These changes help residents develop shared norms and can lead to more effective problem solving, better community institutions, and benefits for individuals. Rohe's research measured such factors as volunteer activity in the neighborhood, residents' participation in organizations outside the neighborhood, the way in which residents used social networks, and the extent to which community organizations worked together.

"What's really new is the combination of concepts that are embedded within [social capital] and the implied relationships within those concepts," Rohe said. "The concept of social capital links civic engagement to trust and ultimately to effective institutions, and in this sense social capital is really a ... causal model. It's not a unitary construct like self-esteem or sense of control."

Other models of social capital recognize additional factors that influence individual and neighborhood outcomes, including intergenerational culture (the degree to which adults and children in a neighborhood relate to each other), reciprocity (the knowledge, resources, and social supports that people exchange), and continuity or stability.

Research has linked social capital with several positive outcomes. The work of Robert Putnam, cited by several panelists, showed that social capital is associated with levels of economic development and the effectiveness of political institutions. Rohe's research in Pittsburgh showed that neighborhoods with higher levels of social capital were more stable over time, as indicated by property values.

Pittsburgh Study Defines and Measures Social Capital

Conference panelist Bill Rohe, Director of the Center for Urban and Regional Studies at the University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill, and colleague Ken Temkin, examined levels of social capital in Pittsburgh neighborhoods and its relationship to neighborhood change over time.

Using measures of social capital developed from a survey conducted by Roger Ahlbrandt in 1980, Rohe and Temkin surveyed and interviewed residents about four topics: community engagement, the characteristics of the community's social networks, trust levels within the community (of fellow residents and of institutions), and the extent and effectiveness of the community organizations. The researchers then merged their survey data with 1980 and 1990 Census data to see what neighborhoods with high levels of social capital in 1980 looked like a decade later.

Rohe and Temkin found that neighborhoods with high levels of social capital were more likely to remain stable over time.

Social Networks and Embeddedness

Social networks—the informal ties that connect individuals to information and resources—exist to varying degrees in most neighborhoods. Research by panelist James Johnson shows that these "bridging" networks give residents a significant boost toward positive outcomes by acting as conduits of information and assistance from one group of individuals to another.

Johnson's research found that the extent to which a resident is embedded in one or several social networks that enhance a

specific outcome, such as employment, helps to determine how successful the individual is in achieving his or her goals (in this case, obtaining a job). Johnson found that women of all race/ethnicities in the Los Angeles neighborhoods he studied were more likely to find jobs if they had links to people who either lived in other neighborhoods, were employed, or were educated beyond the high school level. Johnson found that the effect of some social bridges—gender, race/ethnicity, and receipt of public assistance—differed according to the respondent's race/ethnicity. White and Hispanic women were more likely to be employed if they had networks that included people of both sexes, although that finding was not true for African-American women. Hispanic women who had racially diverse networks were more likely to be employed than their counterparts with racially homogenous networks, although this was not the case for women of other races. African-American and Hispanic women who had at least one person in their network who received public assistance were less likely to be working than their counterparts who did not have this bridge, although this association did not occur for white women.

Johnson cited the following findings by other researchers that help to clarify the effect of social networks:

- Network composition, especially heterogeneity, affects both attitudes and employment outcomes. In a study of job outcomes for African Americans, Braddock and McPartland found that African Americans who were embedded in racially segregated networks, which contain less beneficial information about jobs, had lower incomes than their counterparts in heterogeneous networks.

- The strength of network ties (i.e., the amount of time invested, emotional intensity, intimacy, and reciprocal services that characterize ties) influences employment outcomes. Research by Granovetter, who studied white males, found that those who used strong network ties to conduct job searches earned higher wages.

- Using a personal contact to obtain a job is not necessarily beneficial for disadvantaged individuals. In a study

Social Networks Influence Employment Outcomes

In a study of urban inequality conducted by James H. Johnson of the University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill, researchers used social networks to examine changing labor market dynamics and the role of racial and ethnic polarization. Researchers interviewed and surveyed people from 8,600 households and 4,000 employers in Los Angeles, Boston, Detroit, and Atlanta. Respondents were asked to identify three people outside their household with whom they discussed important matters. For each of these people, the survey recorded data on race/ethnicity, sex, level of education, relationship to the respondent, marital status, residence inside or outside of the respondent's neighborhood, employment status, and receipt of public assistance.

From these data, the researchers determined that a survey respondent had a "bridging" social tie if at least one of the people identified by the respondent was of a different race/ethnicity, sex, or neighborhood, had more than a high school education, had a job, or received public assistance. The researchers examined these "social embeddedness" variables individually and in clusters, along with family context, to determine their effect on the survey respondents' own employment outcomes.

of African Americans in Atlanta, Browne and Hewitt found that those people who acquired their jobs through personal contacts were more likely to have racially segregated, and therefore lower-paying, jobs than those who used formal means.

- Social networks may mediate the potentially negative effects of a neighborhood's inadequate social capital. Ethnographic research by Robin Jarrett has shown that the children of some poor women whose social networks connect them with institutions beyond their own neighborhoods are more likely to have high aspirations for education and other "community-bridging behaviors" than their peers who are not embedded in bridging social networks. Conversely, the absence of social networks can hinder a person's efforts to obtain employment and meet other goals.

The social networks that produce the best outcomes have many members, include people of diverse social statuses who operate in several fields of activity, and bridge distinct social worlds, according to Johnson. Some types of social networks are more valuable than others for achieving certain goals. For individuals who want to find employment, being embedded in a network that bridges neighborhoods or provides links to employed people is most useful; links to people of the opposite sex are more important than links to people of another race.

Collective Efficacy

The concept of collective efficacy described by keynote speaker Felton Earls focuses on the extent to which an organization—in this case, a neighborhood—is ready to solve a problem or address a goal. The model of collective efficacy used in Earls' research incorporates measures of intergenerational culture, reciprocity, and continuity, and differs from the concept of social capital by placing a special emphasis on a community's potential to mobilize for action to resolve problems.

Chicago Study Builds Understanding of Collective Efficacy

The Project on Human Development, led by Dr. Felton Earls of the Harvard School of Public Health, integrates research on community context with research on human psychological and physical development. The study focuses on Chicago because it encompasses established, new, and transitional neighborhoods that house an array of new immigrants as well as European- and African-American residents.

The project, which began in 1995, blends a study of the characteristics and contexts of 343 communities with a longitudinal study of 6,000 children between the ages of birth and 18 and a separate sample of about 9,000 individuals. Researchers collect data through surveys of residents and key players who interact with neighborhoods, to learn about perceptions and behaviors, and by videotaping the physical environment and social interactions.

In the collective efficacy model, residents' perceptions of and attitudes toward each other are as important as characteristics such as race or socioeconomic class, if not more so. In the Chicago neighborhoods where he assessed collective efficacy, Earls asked residents such questions as, "If you saw a child skipping school, do you think people around here would do something about it?" and, "If a fire station in the neighborhood was about to close, do you

think people around here would do something about it?"

Earls found that communities with high levels of social capital have lower levels of crime, violence, teen pregnancy, and delinquency. Further, he found that a neighborhood can have high levels of collective efficacy even if most residents do not actually know each other. In other words, residents may believe that their neighbors will act a certain way, even though they are strangers.

Mechanisms by which Neighborhoods Affect Child and Family Development and Well-Being

Panelist Margery Turner, director of the Metropolitan Housing and Community Policy Center at the Urban Institute, provided an overview and critique of the research literature on neighborhood effects on children and families. With colleague Ingrid Gould-Ellen, Turner reviewed social science research to learn "what has been empirically established, what those findings mean for policy and for interventions in neighborhoods, and what additional research might be needed in this area." She found evidence of some independent neighborhood effects at virtually every stage of a person's life and over a wide range of domains, including education, employment, sexual activity, and criminal involvement.

Turner summarized the key mechanisms identified by research as follows:

- **The quality of local public services**, such as elementary schools, police departments, recreational facilities, child care, and health care
- **Socialization by adults outside the family** with whom children interact; these individuals include role models, communal disciplinarians, and adults who help children understand what constitutes normal and acceptable behavior
- **Peer influences**, especially aspirations for education and employment
- **Social networks**, which help define norms of behavior and connect individuals with jobs and opportunities
- **Exposure to crime and violence**, which traumatizes the emotional and intellectual development of young children and creates opportunities for older children to get hurt or into trouble
- **Physical distance and isolation**, especially from jobs and transportation
- **The stressors that residents encounter** (both real and perceived), which can either motivate or undermine an individual; the balance between stressors and supports available to children and families, and the individuals' ability to recognize, accept, obtain, and use supports, also affect outcomes
- **Contextual factors that trigger coping mechanisms**, especially short-term self-protective behaviors that may undermine long-term positive development

These mechanisms are not mutually exclusive; all, in combination with other factors, probably play a role in determining how neighborhoods matter.

The Role of Community Context

The context in which a child and family lives—especially the availability of resources and the presence of real or

perceived danger—and the way in which people view that context can either enhance or debilitate child and family development.

In particular, perceptions about community context influence how a person behaves. In a study of 600 adolescent African-American males living in urban neighborhoods, panelist Margaret Beale Spencer found that they reacted to their high-risk environments by exhibiting a heightened bravado. In some ways, this was an effective short-term coping mechanism: It left the young men constantly prepared to respond to perceived and actual threats. The youth's bravado also placed them at greater risk with people outside their neighborhood, however.

Neighborhood conditions also influence some family management practices. A study of parenting practices in low- and middle-income Philadelphia families, conducted by Frank Furstenberg and described at the conference by Claudia Coulton, found that although the psychological aspects of parenting did not differ significantly across neighborhoods, parents who lived in the most diminished neighborhoods—areas characterized by few resources and little trust, reciprocity, and other elements of social capital—generally were more restrictive of their children and had to work extra hard to connect the children with organizations and opportunities outside the neighborhood.

Research on Identity and Resilience Recognizes the Importance of Context

Margaret Spencer conducts research on Philadelphia's Start on Success Program, which provides emotionally disturbed youth with classes at the University of Pennsylvania, service learning, job skills development, and mentoring. The program uses family involvement to provide a supportive context for students' development and teaches students that they have positive options for responding to negative environments. Parents participate in group exercises, and mentors serve as surrogate parents.

Spencer assesses the students' recognition of supports that offset stress. "This youngster, as he or she acquires skills, is enveloped by individuals who are vested in positive movement through the program," she said. Students develop "ways of perceiving environments that leaves them open to using more adaptive coping mechanisms."

Research Shows that Neighborhood Context Affects Parenting

In research on 500 families in low- to middle-income neighborhoods in Philadelphia, Frank Furstenburg addressed the question, *Do parents respond to neighborhood conditions in such a way that they change their parenting practices?* The communities ranged from stable working class environments to rapidly declining neighborhoods. Furstenburg and his team administered telephone surveys to all families and conducted an ethnographic study in three neighborhoods—one that encompassed a very dangerous public housing development, one characterized by transition and strife, and one that was very stable, with many community institutions.

Furstenburg hypothesized that in neighborhoods with low social capital and high crime, parents would be very strict with their children, while in neighborhoods with high social cohesion, parenting styles would be more relaxed. The researchers found that parenting did differ by neighborhood and that the quality of the neighborhood made it more or less feasible for parents to connect their children with high-quality institutions and programs. However, the effect of neighborhood differences on children's mental health and behavioral outcomes was less clear.

Parents who lived in environments with greater social cohesion and resources were more likely to allow their children to move freely within the community and did not have to search as hard for opportunities that could help their children experience positive outcomes.

Contextual factors are only partially mediated by parents and have an important effect on when and how a child's needs will be met, according to panelist Robert Halpern. For example, some of the after-school programs studied by Halpern provide children with safe, protected environments, supervision by caring adults, and positive support such as homework assistance and exposure to the arts, sports, service learning, and other stimulating experiences. A child whose neighborhood context includes a high-quality after-school program may develop social skills, make academic progress, and form important bonds with adults, even if his or her home environment does not support these outcomes. However, contextual factors cannot replace important family functions. "It will be important to keep expectations of after-school programs commensurate with their nature as developmental supports," Halpern warned.

Research Looks at Children's Experiences in Non-Family Contexts

Robert Halpern evaluated the Wallace-Reader's Digest Funds' MOST initiative (Making the Most of Out of School Time), an after-school program that operates in Boston, Chicago, and Seattle. The evaluation examines the characteristics of after-school participants, the nature of their participation, and the nature and quality of the MOST sites. Evaluation methods included interviews, observation, analysis of existing quantitative data on service supply in each city, and review of reports from the lead agencies participating in the initiative.

Halpern found that the programs vary widely in terms of structure, content, and areas of focus, and that this variation carries over into children's experiences. Many programs serving low-income children demonstrated poor quality. "The trick in after-school programs seems to be the deliberately designed developmental settings that balance safety, a measure of supervision and attention, [and] opportunity to try [new things] and enjoy a range of arts and sports, in spaces that children ... feel that they own," Halpern concluded.

What does the role of context imply for interventions and research? Understanding the contextual factors that drive children's behavior helps interventions address the specific stressors within neighborhoods and, consequently, have a greater chance of producing desired outcomes. And paying attention to context in data collection and analysis helps researchers understand how neighborhoods matter to children and families.

Community Capacity for Social Change

Since one of the goals of research and evaluation is to provide the information needed to help plan, manage, assess, improve, and advocate for community change, it's important to understand how communities engage in social change and what capacities are necessary to support community-building efforts. Keynote speaker Angela Blackwell, director of an advocacy institution called PolicyLink, and other participants identified the following essential qualities and principles of community building:

Community building is an approach, not an agenda.

The techniques used to build community capacity help prepare residents to achieve a variety of goals. These tactics are not an agenda in themselves; rather, they can be applied to almost any plan for change, whether it focuses on reducing teen pregnancy, revitalizing community housing, improving health care services, moving people from public assistance to the workforce, or any other specific outcome.

When I say "community building," what I'm talking about [is] ... continuous self-renewing efforts by residents and professionals to engage in collective action, problem solving, and enrichment that results in improved lives; new and strengthened assets, relationships, and institutions; and new standards and expectations for life in communities.

—Angela Blackwell

Community building involves continuous problem solving and collective action.

Community building seeks to establish relationships and ways of working collectively that will outlast short-term projects, growing deeper and broader until all of the people connected to a community are participating in problem-solving and enrichment efforts. "We need to think of these communities as places that have a continuous, renewing capacity to educate, to make healthy, to employ, so that those things get embedded ... [and are] there for the next wave of people who come through," Blackwell said.

Community building creates new standards and expectations.

These higher standards can relate to institutions, such as schools; to groups of people who play key roles in neighborhoods, such as police; or to expectations that residents hold for each other's behavior and for their ability to hold each other accountable. Such expectations strengthen the community relationships, institutions, and assets available to children and families.

Effective leadership is crucial.

Strong leaders have broad visions for continuous improvement, visions that are driven by an awareness of neighborhood needs and strengths. Good leaders motivate people, even those who fail to see the full potential for change. "When you're talking about achieving things that haven't been achieved before, you need somebody leading that effort who inspires people to go on in the face of no evidence that [it] will get you anywhere," Blackwell said. Effective leaders also capture the interest of people outside their own sphere of work, which creates valuable opportunities for information sharing and reflection.

The institutions involved in community building must have the capacity to collaborate across organizations, across disciplines, and across differences of opinion.

No single agency is good enough or deep enough to mount a truly comprehensive, sustainable community-building endeavor on its own, Blackwell said. Agencies must collaborate, which requires the institutional capacity to:

- Maintain firm goals for change without alienating other agencies
- Introduce good ideas for change in ways that encourage community members to embrace them as their own
- Create an environment in which diverse partners work together, regardless of their differences

Effective community-building efforts take a comprehensive approach to neighborhood change.

Community-building strategies need to bridge the roles and jurisdictions of individual people, institutions, services, and resources in order to solve the challenges faced by children and families. "You have to integrate people-based and place-based strategies in order to make a difference," observed Ron Register, director of the Cleveland Community Building Initiative. "You have to think about education at the same time you think about things like health, and so on, so that you have a comprehensive, holistic, integrated approach to neighborhood change."

The need for comprehensiveness should also drive collaborators beyond racial and economic boundaries, Blackwell said. "You cannot solve the problems in the African-American communities in this country only working with people who are African-American and who happen to live in those neighborhoods," Blackwell said. "You have to reach out ... into different races, into different classes."

Community-building efforts should be oriented toward improving assets, rather than "fixing" deficits.

Even the most economically impoverished neighborhoods have assets, especially in their residents, that can be organized to support social change. Focusing on local assets acknowledges the positive ingredients for community change that already exist and helps to ensure that interventions build on the neighborhood's unique resources and conditions. The Cleveland Community Building Initiative, for example, made asset orientation a guiding principle of poverty intervention. Two of the four village councils created by the initiative began to develop inventories of assets relevant to the neighborhoods' action projects.

Residents and other informed stakeholders must be active and meaningful participants in planning and implementing community-building efforts.

Essential knowledge about communities comes from residents, local organizations that work in neighborhoods, and other people who link neighborhoods with outside resources. Often, community-building initiatives include these representatives on collaborative boards that oversee strategic planning; the Neighborhood and Family Initiative, described by evaluator Robert Chaskin, is one such example. "In order to get a comprehensive neighborhood development strategy, you need to ground it in the priorities and needs and understanding of the community," Chaskin explained. The roles, relationships, and processes used by these collaboratives offer an insight for evaluators into the dynamics of community change.

Programs that operate within community-building initiatives should have realistic expectations for what outcomes can and should be achieved.

For example, after-school programs—an increasingly common approach to augmenting children's education and serving families' child care needs in communities with few other resources—often target youth development as a primary goal. Many of these programs do provide activities that let children experience success, form bonds with caring adults, and become exposed to worlds and futures beyond their neighborhood. But, as evaluator Robert Halpern observed, it may be asking too much of these programs to assume that participation "can or should nurture the basic skills, sense of worth, confidence, or acceptance that family, school, and other key basic institutions are responsible for providing."

Evaluation is an important part of community-building endeavors.

Evaluation data help communities and program funders understand what they have accomplished, what they have learned in the process, and how they might refine their efforts to produce even better outcomes. Evaluation data also become a valuable tool for advocacy—or, as Blackwell describes it, a community commodity. "Being able to articulate the role and the value of data as a community commodity that is understood, sought, and utilized is a very important part of the change process," said Blackwell, whose work with the Urban Strategies Council to help communities use data is described on page 44 of this summary.

Evaluating Initiatives that Strengthen Families and Build Communities

Comprehensive community initiatives, especially those designed to strengthen families and communities, are complex undertakings. They involve intangible, ever-changing relationships, interactions, and processes, which makes them as hard to evaluate as they are to implement. This section describes issues in three areas central to research on these initiatives: Evaluation design and methods, technical assistance to intervention sites, and the presentation of research data.

Challenges for Evaluation Design and Methodology

Major challenges include: (1) clarifying the unit of analysis; (2) clarifying the purpose and magnitude of the evaluation; (3) defining outcomes, indicators, and measures; (4) measuring elusive aspects of change; (5) conducting comparative research; (6) timing evaluation activities; (7) integrating qualitative and quantitative data; and (8) using a two-tiered approach to combine national and local evaluations.

Clarifying the Unit of Analysis

What constitutes a neighborhood? Is it a place bounded by geographical limits? A community historically identified by certain characteristics, including demographic similarities and social cohesion? A uniquely named area perceived by residents, and reflected in local culture, as having a distinct identity? Or is it a tract or a block group designated by the U.S. Census or local government?

The definition of neighborhood used by an evaluator holds implications for research design, data collection, and analysis. Researchers must ensure that their data accurately captures effects within the individuals, families, and institutions in the appropriate area. In addition, interesting effects that appear at very small levels, such as the block group, can wash out in a larger level of analysis. As Felton Earls observed, for example, a large public housing complex may represent a unique ecological niche—essentially, a neighborhood—but it also is embedded in a larger neighborhood, and it would be misleading to equate growing up in the public housing complex with growing up a block away.

The best definition of neighborhood for measuring change may fluctuate according to the effect being measured. As Constancia Warren, an evaluator of the New York City Beacons initiative, noted, if the goal of defining "community" is to establish demographic context, the neighborhood boundary will probably be determined by zip code or Census tract, since that is the format most data bases use to record demographic information. If the purpose is to measure community perceptions of an institution, a reasonable boundary might be a 10-minute radius from the institution being studied. If the purpose is to assess changes in neighborhood safety attributable to the institution, the area might be much smaller, perhaps one to three blocks.

If the unit of analysis is several neighborhoods, as it often is in national evaluations of multi-site initiatives, researchers struggle with two issues: overcoming variation within neighborhoods

to understand differences between neighborhoods, and drawing conclusions that cut across neighborhood-specific findings.

In the first instance, a neighborhood that on the surface appears to represent a single characteristic may, when examined person by person or family by family, reveal so much variation that it is difficult to make useful comparisons with another neighborhood. For example, Felton Earls described comparing two neighborhoods that represented very different levels of real-estate value. When he examined real-estate value *within* each neighborhood, he also found extensive variation in housing costs, even though other aspects of the neighborhood might have remained the same. "The within-[neighborhood] variation is so much ... that you almost say, 'Why doesn't everybody just move into [the low-cost area] and save rent,'" Earls observed. While differences across neighborhoods are often obvious, the issue of distinguishing within-neighborhood differences remains a problem for researchers, he added.

The second issue occurs when individual neighborhoods have great leeway in designing their local transformation, so that the actions taken vary tremendously across sites. The challenge is to distill coherent findings rather than to simply describe many discrete changes. One solution in this situation is to make the initiative itself the unit of analysis, rather than the neighborhood—an approach used by the evaluation of the Neighborhood and Family Initiative, conducted by The Chapin Hall Center for Children at the University of Chicago. In this case, researchers focused on the development of overall goals, ideas, principles, and structures rather than on neighborhood-specific changes. This approach can generate useful information about the process of community transformation, but it yields fewer lessons about some effects.

Clarifying the Purpose and Magnitude of an Evaluation

Evaluations are conducted to document change, assess strategies, expand knowledge within and across disciplines, inform practitioners, monitor program quality, guide policy makers—and sometimes all of the above, simultaneously. The purpose of an evaluation influences the scope of the overall research and the amount and type of research than can realistically be expected during the first years of an initiative. If the purpose is to contribute information on a complex initiative to a field of knowledge—a broad goal that assumes a large public audience and demands a large-scale evaluation effort—it may not be realistic to expect too many early results. If the purpose is to help the initiative understand its actions and impacts related to one or two specific outcomes, or to document a specific process, evaluators can more easily produce short-term, targeted tools for understanding. Some evaluators keep the story of an initiative to themselves during the course of their work, divulging it at the end of the study in a comprehensive report. Others envision evaluation as a chance to engage sites in a continuous process of feedback, reflection, and renewal.

Several issues complicate efforts to clarify an evaluation's purpose. First, the purpose of the initiative often is unclear during planning and early implementation. It takes some time for local leaders and their funders to reach consensus on agendas, work out differences, develop relationships, move from vague objectives to concrete tactics, and organize actions. Until the initiative has clear goals, evaluators cannot

begin measuring progress toward meeting the goals.

Second, funders of initiatives often are deliberately non-prescriptive in their early interactions with grantees, hoping to stimulate the sites to define their own goals. At the same time, grant recipients are anxious to know what their funders expect to happen; they want to understand the rules of the game. As technical assistance provider Bill Traynor suggested, "There's as certain deliberateness to the [confusion] at the beginning that I think is somewhat inevitable and unavoidable, and of course that has tremendous impacts ... [on] the way that an initiative can be operationalized." That confusion also influences how evaluators assess those operations and their effects.

Defining Outcomes, Indicators, and Measures

Evaluations rely on indicators, and measures of those indicators, to show whether interventions have produced their intended outcomes. Evaluations of initiatives that involve such concepts as social capital, family strength, community, community efficacy, and empowerment face extra challenges in defining outcomes, indicators, and measures.

Definition of Terms

Outcomes are the effects caused by an intervention's activities and strategies.

Indicators are specific, measurable manifestations of an outcome.

Measures are the tools used to collect data on indicators and outcomes.

One problem is that there are no standard definitions for many of these concepts, and therefore no consistent norms, measures, thresholds, or ranges to apply. This makes it hard to accurately measure neighborhood capacity, compare across sites or interventions, and understand successful outcomes.

In addition, changes in neighborhoods and individuals take many forms, and it may require a combination of evaluation approaches to capture the various outcomes. For example, evaluators could focus on changes in neighborhood infrastructure, such as the number, type, size, diversity, effectiveness, and participation rates of organizations. Or, they could measure changes in processes, such as collaboration among those organizations. Researchers could examine engagement and interaction *within* a neighborhood, such as the amount and quality of interaction among residents, volunteer activity, participation in neighborhood organizations, and use of neighborhood facilities. Or they could focus on engagement *across* neighborhoods, including participation in organizations and facilities located outside the neighborhood of study. Often, research comes closest to understanding complex community changes when it relies on a variety of indicators, but a multi-pronged approach can complicate evaluation design and data collection.

Using examples from their own research, conference participants discussed (1) key outcomes pursued by community initiatives and (2) the ways in which evaluators of these initiatives identified and used indicators of change to measure progress toward the desired outcomes.

We need to come to more precise definitions about family strength and what it means, how it's demonstrated, how it can best be fostered, and how it can be measured. And we need to get much smarter about the ways in which neighborhood resources and characteristics can help or hinder the efforts of families to protect and nurture their kids. What kind of child and family outcomes are most strongly connected to neighborhood factors?

—Tony Cipollone

Outcomes targeted by major interventions

The evaluation of the **Beacons Initiative**, conducted by the Academy for Educational Development, sought to capture developmental outcomes in students who attended the initiative's neighborhood centers, which operate at selected schools in New York City. (For more on the Beacons evaluation activities, see box on page 29.) The evaluation focused on outcomes in the initiative's two areas of interest: the establishment of partnerships between schools, school districts, community-based organizations, and public secular agencies, and the use of these partnerships to bring an array of youth-development activities and services into the schools and to promote a holistic approach to serving young people. The evaluators identified the following outcomes:

- For elementary school-aged children—sense of safety and physical well-being, sense of belonging, skills for resisting risky behaviors, self-worth and self-esteem, attachment to peers and adults, attachment to school, perceived importance of school, comfort in school and with school work, regular school attendance, high academic grades
- For adolescents (in addition to the same outcomes listed for younger children)—skills in decision making, problem solving, and communication, and participation in community service
- For adults—acquisition of new skills; freedom to work outside the home; support for children's education; establishment of new friendships and contacts; participation in family, school, and community activities
- For schools and other institutions—a role in organizing family-centered activities, support for parents' role in developing their children's educational and social skills, closer relationships between the institution and families, institutional support for children's healthy behavior
- For neighborhoods—actual and perceived areas of safety, awareness of and access to community resources, contact and relationships across community groups, collective problem solving, resident influence over the nature of community transformation

Evaluators of the **Rebuilding Communities Initiative** identified five broad areas in which they expected to see neighborhood outcomes: the capacity and impact of neighborhood resources and institutions, the effectiveness of service delivery systems, financial investment in the communities, physical infrastructure (e.g., housing) and social infrastructure, and the capacity of local government. This evaluation, conducted by OMG Center for Collaborative Learning, chose those outcome areas because they were broad enough to encompass the wide variation of strategies and perspectives across sites, yet targeted enough to generate useful information for the sites.

The **Cleveland Community Building Initiative,** created to address poverty in Cleveland, embraced a holistic, asset-oriented approach to service integration, combining both place-based and people-based strategies and engaging neighborhood residents in the change process. The key to this intervention was the creation of village councils in four neighborhoods—forums where residents, social service agencies, and other stakeholders could develop strategies and form links with business and civic leaders outside the community. The evaluation of this intervention, conducted by the Center for Urban Poverty and Social Change at Case Western Reserve University, initially targeted outcomes in five areas: formation and operation of inclusive village councils; identification and incorporation of neighborhood assets; formation of an action agenda for each community; development of high-quality program characteristics; and development of collaborative, citywide partnerships.

Multi-Site Evaluation Emphasizes Outcomes in Common Areas

The Rebuilding Communities Initiative operated in one neighborhood or community in each of five cities: Boston, Philadelphia, Washington, Denver, and Detroit. This capacity-building intervention, which began in 1994, had a broad mandate to stimulate collaboration between leading community organizations and other key players that would ultimately create, develop, or strengthen neighborhood governments, processes, and structures. Collaborators at each site established their own strategies for developing and empowering local leaders, supported by technical assistance.

Evaluators used site visits to collect qualitative data on local context and to inform the development of cross-site and site-specific indicators of progress. Evaluators also administered a door-to-door community survey to block groups within each neighborhood.

Initially, evaluators expected to focus half of the survey on cross-site issues and half on site-specific issues, to capture the variation of strategies across sites. However, they found that each site, although very different from its counterparts, related to the same core set of outcomes and indicators. The resulting survey primarily used measures common to all five communities.

In the above examples and other discussions of outcomes, two broad themes emerged: (1) the importance of measuring early, interim, and long-term outcomes; and (2) the need to distinguish individual results from neighborhood outcomes.

Measuring early, interim, and long-term outcomes. Researchers generally accept the value of assessing early, interim, and long-term outcomes—not just the final outcomes. Interim outcomes are especially important because they reveal the year-to-year nuances that produce ultimate social change and they make explicit the links between actions, benchmarks, and outcomes. For example, by understanding changes in parent engagement, such as involvement in children's education, researchers may gain an earlier and clearer understanding of long-term increases in children's test scores.

Valuable interim outcomes can be directly or indirectly related to the ultimate outcome. Improved school attendance and engagement in course work are interim outcomes along a direct path to improved learning and academic performance, for instance. But, as Beacons site leader Sister Mary Geraldine observed, if the purpose of a good education is to get a good job, development of the social competencies needed to obtain and hold a job—especially

interpersonal skills such as communication, conflict resolution, and collaboration—are equally important interim outcomes. Thus, evaluation frameworks need to assess many types of outcomes.

Poverty Intervention Supports Four Diverse Pathways to Outcomes

The Cleveland Community Building Initiative (CCBI) grew out of the Rockefeller Foundation's Community Planning and Action Project, a six-city effort in the 1980s to galvanize communities to address poverty. Those activities in Cleveland included a study of neighborhood poverty by Claudia Coulton at Case Western Reserve University's Center for Urban Poverty and Social Change. The report spawned a commission on poverty, and CCBI was developed to implement the commission's recommendations.

The initiative created a village council in each of four neighborhoods to serve as the change agent. Each of the four village councils has a strategic plan for action. One created a school-based family education center; another gained seats on a local development organization's board in order to improve housing. The third council focused on improving outcomes for youth at risk by working with the juvenile justice system, and the fourth is developing an information and referral system to improve access to services.

The CCBI evaluation used a theories of change approach. Evaluators involved residents and other community stakeholders in defining interim and long-term outcomes, benchmarks of progress, and measures. Data sources for measuring these benchmarks included Census data, interviews with council members, self-assessment questionnaires, and residents' applications for council membership.

Researchers continue to struggle to help initiatives define interim outcomes, however. Local change agents usually can describe their immediate and ultimate goals more easily than they can articulate the changes they hope to see along the way, especially at the beginning of a multi-year initiative.

Initial and early outcomes—these early events that are important in the life of [the initiative], and the ultimate outcomes, were pretty clear. [But interim outcomes were] really fuzzy. We'd keep pushing people along, asking what comes next, what comes after that. Somebody finally said, "Do you want to know what I'm going to do in Year 5? Ask me in Year 4."

— Sharon Milligan, evaluator of the Cleveland Community Building Initiative

Distinguishing individual or resident results from neighborhood or community outcomes. An intervention may seek changes in individuals and families, in neighborhoods, or at both levels. This has two implications for social research. First, as noted above, evaluations must use data collection and analysis methods that are appropriate to the level of change being sought. Second, evaluators must weigh the importance of each type of outcome in relation to the others.

In one sense, it isn't an either/or proposition; neighborhood outcomes are closely related to resident outcomes. For example, evaluators of the Rebuilding Communities Initiative suggested that, since neighborhoods mediate the experiences of individuals, changes measured in neighborhoods could be viewed as intermediate outcomes along the path to ultimate outcomes for children and families. This approach allowed the researchers to identify outcomes that might not be possible to capture at the individual

level, especially within a timeframe of just a few years. Conversely, evaluators of the Beacons initiative documented changes in individuals that could suggest broader changes in social capital, such as an improved ability to collaborate across ethnic boundaries (although the initiative, which establishes youth development and social service programs in schools, was not explicitly designed as a community-building endeavor and is not being evaluated in those terms).

Researchers do not necessarily agree on the way in which neighborhood conditions and outcomes affect individual outcomes, which raises concerns about using one result to indicate or explain the other. In addition, if a community transformation initiative is successful, some families will develop capacities that enable them to move to other, more promising communities. While the outcomes for these families are significant, changes in the neighborhood overall might be much less dramatic, even immeasurable. Unless evaluators can track these families, which is extremely difficult to do, the evaluation risks losing its ability to capture the real change.

The evaluation of the Jobs-Plus intervention, conducted by Manpower Demonstration Research Corporation, addressed the issue of individual versus neighborhood effects with a dual-level approach. Evaluators plan to track individual participants from the intervention into the workforce to learn what proportion of people living in the housing developments are working and what their characteristics and work experiences are. The evaluation also will examine trends in workforce participation and the use of public assistance to see whether they change over time, and will compare them to trends at comparison sites to see whether the changes can be attributed to Jobs-Plus.

Employment Intervention Seeks Changes in Both Individuals and Communities

The goal of Jobs-Plus is to dramatically increase employment to residents of eight public housing developments, with an expectation that the lessons learned might apply to efforts nationwide to address concentrated urban poverty. This demonstration program, which operates in Baltimore, Chattanooga, Cleveland, Dayton, Los Angeles (two sites), Seattle, and St. Paul, gives leadership responsibility to local partnerships of residents, the public housing authority, the public assistance administration, job training programs, and community agencies.

Jobs-Plus helps sites adopt good job training practices, works to ensure that jobs pay enough to make working worthwhile (which also means renegotiating rent policies and welfare rules to erase disincentives for employment), creates community support for employment, and removes barriers such as lack of day care or transportation. Sites receive technical assistance to develop collaborative relationships and design programs.

The Jobs-Plus evaluation examines the implementation of these components, focusing on what impact the initiative has on work and, consequently, on quality of life for the residents and the community. Data collection includes baseline and follow-up surveys and interviews, observations, and case studies conducted by on-site researchers.

Indicators and measures used to evaluate the outcomes of major interventions

How do evaluators identify ways to measure outcomes? Conference participants provided several examples.

Because the **Rebuilding Communities Initiative** was intentionally broad and did not have clear definitions for expected actions, its evaluators used a theories of change approach to find ways of measuring progress, evaluator Tom Burns recalled. "We began with what we had, which was those five very broadly stated [outcome] areas, and we said ... 'What are the kinds of things that we think could possibly happen over the timeframe of this initiative?'"

Evaluators talked with program staff at each site to learn their assumptions, expectations, and planned pathways for change and to determine what information site leaders needed to improve their work. This generated a comprehensive list of indicators that reflected the sites' major program areas. The evaluators then grouped the indicators into categories, corresponding to the program areas that they expected each site to pursue. They created a logic model, linking the strategies that emerged at the sites with concrete program areas and activities.

"The process went on for some time with the program staff [and] was repeated with each of the five sites as they were still in the very early stage of shaping their plans and strategies," Burns said. Each site also received technical assistance to develop an information system that would support data collection and analysis.

Through this process, the evaluators developed the following indicators:

- The character and capacity of infrastructure (i.e., social and physical resources) within neighborhoods
- Lead organizations' roles in the community as conveners, facilitators, and coordinators of community-building efforts—especially their inclusiveness, ability to collaborate, leadership of an agenda for change, and use of local assets
- The delivery systems by which resources and services enter the neighborhood and affect families
- The way that financial resources are formed (e.g., availability of mortgages, lending practices)
- Residents' perceptions of neighborhood institutions and resources
- Neighborhood safety, including crime statistics, residents' perceptions of safety, and factors that influence how the neighborhood receives safety services (e.g., number of police stations, officers' training and experience levels)

Evaluators of the **Cleveland Community Building Initiative** similarly began by involving residents, business leaders, and other stakeholders in developing an evaluation framework, explained Milligan:

> *Initially, we experiment[ed] with ... forward mapping. You know, asking 'What's your initial result, what are the activities that surround it leading to the long-term outcome, and then mapping backwards in terms of looking at the long-term ... things that everybody wants to accomplish. What actually emerged from these conversations [was] a generalized theory of change.*

Evaluators focused on the five initial outcomes, described earlier, that all collaborators agreed were cornerstones of the initiative. For each target outcome, they talked with stakeholders about benchmarks that could be used to indicate progress and ways of measuring the benchmarks. For the outcome of inclusiveness in village councils, for example, the evaluators decided to examine the socio-demographic profile of council members and compare it to the profile of the neighborhood overall.

The evaluations of **Plain Talk**, a five-site teen pregnancy prevention initiative, and **Community Change for Youth Development**, a six-site initiative designed to increase positive youth development opportunities, measured the outcomes of local planning and implementation. These evaluations, conducted by Public/Private Ventures, looked at the following types of indicators:

- Individuals' attitudes, behavior, and knowledge about relevant services
- Access to and use of services and opportunities in key areas (e.g., adolescents' access to adult support and guidance within and outside the family; use of out-of-school time)
- Evidence of progress by neighborhood governance groups (e.g., how well they developed, what challenges they faced, what roles they planned, what knowledge and capacities they acquired)
- Quality of activities and interactions (e.g., content, format, and relevance of workshops designed to build neighborhood capacity; nature of tasks targeted by community institutions; status of social networks)
- Achievement of the interim goals that community groups set for themselves

In general, conference participants agreed that residents and community groups should help shape an evaluation's indicators and measures, because their decision-making needs will help define data needs. Involving community members in developing the evaluation also builds their investment in the evaluation process.

Measuring Change

Neighborhood transformation and child and family development involve complicated, non-linear, and sometimes controversial processes, interactions, and relationships—aspects that are notoriously difficult to measure using traditional evaluation methods. Participants raised the following issues related to measurement:

> ***Change is a dynamic process. The processes being measured, as well as the target outcomes, are constantly shifting. Evaluation approaches must be flexible to accommodate these changes.***

As neighborhoods strengthen systems and relationships, they change their goals and their methods for achieving them. To accurately measure these moving targets, researchers must recognize when the initial target outcomes are no longer relevant or require different measurement techniques. Most participants appeared to support an evaluation style that begins with clearly defined expected outcomes but measures a broad enough range of indicators, and remains flexible enough, to allow shifts in focus that match an initiative's evolving goals.

Although several researchers noted that the "fuzziness" of some interim outcomes results in collecting some data that later

prove unimportant, several participants echoed evaluator Robert Halpern's argument that "what evaluators really need to do is wait as long as they possibly can before trying to decide what the story is ... and in a sense not trying to figure out what they're measuring as outcomes until the very last moment," because the precise elements that need to be measured may change over time. This is not to say that evaluators should not engage in their work until the intervention is well under way, Halpern added; rather, they should concentrate at first on understanding and documenting the early dynamics of decision making, priority setting, and relationship building among collaborators.

The theories of change approach to evaluation represents a direct effort to accommodate evolving outcomes in an evaluation design.

This approach engages stakeholders and evaluators in defining target outcomes, activities that will lead to the outcomes, and indicators of progress. The approach tries to make an initiative's assumptions and goals explicit and, by placing a priority on measuring interim outcomes, to spot potential shifts in the initiative's focus.

The theories of change approach gets mixed reviews from researchers. Some participants suggested that these self-reflective qualities make the approach more useful to the people responsible for the initiative's actions than to the evaluators trying to assess them. The approach does not necessarily provide a framework for understanding the dynamic process of linking current activities and outcomes to future priorities and problem-solving capabilities, some participants said. However, other evaluators described benefits of the theories of change approach for both researchers and practitioners:

- Although it can consume a lot of resources, the approach helps to create "rigor and discipline" out of comprehensive change initiatives that have ambitious goals but no framework for action, said Gertrude Spilka, an evaluator of the Rebuilding Communities Initiative. "[I]t sets some expectations, and real beginnings, and some clear paths about how one might get there," she said.

- It engages diverse stakeholder groups in considering how their actions relate to desired outcomes, and these discussions keep local players in the information loop normally reserved for evaluators and funders.

- It forces evaluators to start examining the fit between an intervention's goals, actions, and claims of success at the beginning of an initiative, instead of trying to reconstruct the pieces at a later date.

- It focuses on expected outcomes and is open to revision and modification if the theories do not hold true; thus, the approach is flexible enough to permit an evaluation to change alongside an intervention.

Even critics of the theories of change approach suggested that more front-end effort to define goals and pathways for change—and perhaps to build community consensus on them—would produce better-designed interventions and evaluations.

The confluence of multiple initiatives in some communities complicates efforts to measure specific effects.

An abundance of interventions and, consequently, evaluations within a single community increases the burden on evaluation respondents, makes it difficult to

establish causality, and possibly dilutes the impact of any single initiative. "I remember being in Seattle and realizing at one point that one resident could have a Jobs-Plus case manager, a case manager for [a federal job training program], a welfare case manager, a case manager for this refugee center ... and who knows how many others," recalled Jobs-Plus evaluator James Riccio. Tracing the precise effect of each influence is a challenge for researchers.

The complicated nature of individual, family, and community change makes it especially important to measure change at a variety of levels, using a variety of methods.

Researchers measuring social capital, for instance, can capture several dimensions of change by examining the levels of community engagement and trust, the characteristics of social networks, and the extent and effectiveness of community institutions, as Rohe suggested. To develop a deeper understanding of social change, however, evaluators should measure several aspects of each of these constructs. Community trust can be assessed not only by how residents perceive their neighborhoods but also how institutions perceive the neighborhoods in which they work and how this influences their efforts to engage residents. In fact, researchers run a smaller risk of losing valuable information if they analyze community change on a variety of separate indices, such as the constructs of social capital outlined above, than if they try to create a composite scale of social capital by blending results on the component dimensions.

Multi-measurement approaches are especially important because neighborhoods and families are interrelated. Each dimension of family and community life affects outcomes for individuals and neighborhoods. As one participant noted, "It's not just because social capital is high that everything's going to go well.... In every community you have to see what the effects of various elements are, and how each one plays a part. You have to get at what the strengths and weaknesses are and how they affect each other."

Multiple-measurement approaches promoted by participants include: assessing residents' perceptions, experiences, and characteristics through surveys; collecting demographic and process information from administrative and statistical data bases; gathering contextual data through interviews and observations; and developing case studies and ethnographies.

An intervention may appear to fail not because it was poorly designed or implemented but because it had insufficient resources to meet its goals. Evaluations should measure outcomes that can reasonably be produced given the available resources.

Lack of resources may affect the kind of outcomes that are achieved and, consequently, measured by evaluations. For example, an intervention that has inadequate human or financial resources may end up doing a little good for a lot of people, when its purpose—and therefore the yardstick by which its success was measured—was to do a lot more good for fewer people. "One way a lot of evaluations of these kinds of initiatives are set up to show failure is if the initiative defines outcomes at ... a broad level [but] has nowhere the magnitude of resources to impact in that amount of time," observed researcher Rick Brandon.

When evaluators are deciding which outcomes to measure, Brandon added, they should consult with local stakeholders about how much progress toward each goal can

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reasonably be expected given existing resources.

> ***Evaluations do not always consider the effect of ecological factors on the outcomes they measure. These factors include environmental risks and community conflict or controversy.***

During a discussion of the Rebuilding Communities Initiative, conference panelist James Johnson urged evaluators to think not only about obvious indicators, such as neighborhood crime and unemployment, but also the imperceptible factors that pose developmental risks for urban children and families, such as exposure to lead-based paint in housing developments and neighborhood institutions. "To what extent are those issues factored in, when we know these things affect learning and child development, family development?" he asked. Finding a home or a child care program for a family might be considered an asset, he added, but "when you look at the developmental risk when you put a kid in an environment that's contaminated, you may be doing him more harm."

Although competing priorities usually push environmental concerns to the bottom of the list for initiatives and their evaluations, Johnson suggested that evaluators should at least ask local stakeholders about their awareness of and concern for those factors that are not easily perceived.

Similarly, research rarely captures the shape and effects of neighborhood controversies, despite their prevalence in the communities where interventions typically occur. "As attractive as the concept [of social capital] is, what strikes me is that it leaves out realities of social conflict [and] competition," observed Sister Mary Paul Janchill, director of a Beacons site. "Sometimes you can have too much [emphasis on] cohesiveness, agreement, collaboration. I'm not sure that it does justice to some of the real challenges."

Researchers, evaluators, and change agents all acknowledge that community conflict or controversy affects the process of social change and the achievement of outcomes, but none of the parties have paid adequate attention to understanding how, agreed Garland Yates, a senior associate at The Annie E. Casey Foundation. "It is so difficult to evaluate and assess [that] it falls off the table at some point," he said. "We have to embrace the challenge to figure that out."

> *Because measuring community conflict is difficult, "we have the struggle we have in terms of how to get people to talk about social networks and the development of relationships beyond [the fact] that they are good things to do. There ought to be a rationale and a reason to them, and ... the reason is about the genesis of conflict and controversy."*
>
> —Garland Yates

Conducting Comparative Research

Several issues make it difficult to conduct comparative research on complex, comprehensive initiatives:

- **Every neighborhood is subject to multiple influences and interventions.** Regional economies and programs unrelated to the community-building initiative, such as welfare reform or rent incentives for public housing, can influence outcomes in ways that make it difficult to attribute differences to a particular intervention.

- **Service providers who operate in both intervention and comparison sites may change their services in the comparison site as a result of**

participating in the intervention site. This change in practices blurs the distinction between the two sites.

- **Neighborhoods may not have demographic and contextual characteristics that are similar enough to support comparisons.**

You can't assume that the control group is a no-treatment group .... [T]he burden for the evaluation is to measure that and say, well, they had some extra treatment but how much difference in treatment is there and of what kind?

— James Riccio

Despite these challenges, several approaches allow researchers to make comparisons. One technique is to carefully monitor services in a comparison site so that, if there is a finding of "no impact," evaluators can determine whether the intervention failed or whether the comparison site managed to deliver comparable services without the intervention. For example, the Beacons evaluation surveyed middle-school students on selected outcomes in Beacons schools and in non-intervention schools that are not within walking distance. The surveys included questions about after-school activities so evaluators could rule out similar activities as a possible explanation for similar outcomes.

Comparative research on community change can also be conducted by randomly assigning whole communities, rather than individuals, to treatment and control groups. This is the case in the Jobs-Plus evaluation, which uses entire housing developments instead of individual residents as its sample points. The Jobs-Plus initiative, which concentrated employment interventions in public housing developments, required cities applying for the demonstration grants to identify three developments that met the grant criteria. From each of these clusters, Jobs-Plus selected one site for funding and used the other two as comparison sites. Evaluators conducted baseline surveys and are monitoring changes in these sites as well as the sites involved in the actual Jobs-Plus intervention.

Timing Evaluation Activities

Two timing issues shape the focus and nature of evaluation: (1) the point in an intervention's life at which an evaluation begins, and (2) the stages that an evaluation moves through over the course of an initiative.

When should evaluation begin?

Until recently, evaluations rarely started at the same time as the interventions they sought to explain. It could be years or even decades before researchers formally assessed outcomes, during which time the intervention had grown, shifted in focus, or sometimes disappeared. This norm is changing as funders' expectations for early accountability grow and as practitioners see the need for earlier feedback on their efforts. Researchers still have mixed opinions about the optimum time to begin an evaluation, however.

When evaluators wait to begin measuring change until the initiative is well under way, neighborhood collaborators gain time to sort out their new roles and relationships, balance the competing interests of various funders, and build trust and ownership among partners. But the decision to delay evaluation until after the initiative's planning and start-up phases are completed makes it harder to capture baseline conditions and important early events, interactions, and processes.

Documentation—research that records the story of what is happening, without necessarily evaluating impact or effectiveness—offers a way to collect important early information while researchers wait to define and design their evaluation. The purpose of documentation is to capture descriptive data on an intervention's emerging processes, activities, interactions, and patterns of behavior to establish a reference point for later analysis and reflection. Documentation not only creates an historical record of an intervention, it may also make qualitative data available long before researchers have agreed on the evaluation's purpose.

How does timing affect evaluation activities and interests?

Research and evaluation are iterative processes, much like interventions themselves. As researchers refine their understanding of an initiative, as the initiative itself unfolds, and as data needs change, the research focus evolves.

Participants generally agreed that early research activities include clarifying the goals of the initiative and the evaluation, documenting the process of change, developing appropriate indicators of change, and establishing a baseline for data that can be tracked during the life of the intervention. Through these endeavors, researchers concentrate on learning whether their initial presumptions about the intervention hold true and whether the intervention's own short-term objectives are being met. For instance, are collaborative groups being formed in the neighborhood, and are they developing viable partnerships that can strengthen families and promote community change? What evidence exists that collaboration actually is occurring?

The process of developing indicators of outcomes usually begins during this first stage of evaluation design, and if stakeholders from the intervention participate, it can be as useful for the intervention as it is for the evaluation. These early indicators will not necessarily last the duration of the evaluation, participants cautioned; they will be refined, discarded, and supplemented as the initiative takes shape. Also, during the early stages of implementation an initiative may be too amorphous to support accurate measurement against the indicators. "[I]ndicator work happens progressively," observed Tom Burns, an evaluator of the Rebuilding Communities Initiative. "It messes us up if we get too caught up in a reliance on indicators at early phases of these initiatives ... and pretend there is a precision and a rigor at moments in these initiatives when it just isn't there."

Research that tries to monitor early developments on a fast timeline—for example, on a monthly basis—runs a risk of over-analyzing the few actions that occur early on, one participant suggested. Slowing the pace of analysis to a semi-annual timeframe may yield more significant findings of change.

As the intervention takes hold, researchers continue to refine their analyses of the change process and also begin to assess program development and quality, outcomes, and effectiveness. Eventually, researchers should begin to provide feedback to local collaborators and build local capacity for self-evaluation and data use. In most traditional evaluations, these activities occur fairly late in the research schedule, if at all. Participants urged their colleagues to share data and analysis with sites more frequently, in time to help inform strategic action and before the findings become dated. Issues related to feedback and local data use are discussed in more detail on pages 38-43 of this summary.

Integrating Qualitative and Quantitative Data

Quantitative data, from surveys and analyses of statistical or administrative databases, and qualitative data, from interviews, focus groups, structured observations, and case studies, reveal different aspects of the same complex story. By including both types of data in their work, researchers can describe family and community change more deeply, accurately, credibly, and compellingly.

For example, the quantitative evaluation of the Jobs-Plus initiative uses surveys and administrative data to examine employment outcomes related to institutional change and services and to assess the feasibility of operating the intervention in diverse settings. A qualitative component, led by on-site anthropologists, incorporates observation, informal interviews, and case studies of the experiences of individuals who participate in the initiative. The evaluation of Plain Talk supplemented baseline and follow-up surveys with ethnographic research at three in-depth study sites. On-site researchers interviewed local participants and observed activities, focusing on the nature and quality of interactions among community members and between the community and the intervention.

Qualitative and quantitative data should be integrated and mutually reinforcing so that each augments the other. Thus, for example, evaluators of the Beacons initiative use results from site observations to guide instrument development for surveys, interview people after they have completed surveys, and enter qualitative data into databases that support tabulation.

Participants raised two concerns about qualitative research in evaluations of complex social change:

- **The quality of data collection can vary widely**, especially in large-scale evaluations that rely on many observers and interviewers and in two-tiered evaluations that involve local participants in data collection. Key gaps can occur in (1) site visitors' knowledge about the intervention, framework for understanding what they see and hear, and skills in interviewing and understanding; and (2) community representatives' capacity to describe their philosophies and strategies.

- **All members of a research team may not reach the same conclusions from qualitative data**, or the data may fail to support impressions derived from observations. Researchers bring their own views and experiences to an interview or site visit, and these individual characteristics color their perceptions. Also, because site visits allow researchers to observe activities and factors beyond the scope of the evaluation, site visitors may reach conclusions that cannot be supported by the data. As a result, some of these conclusions cannot be reported. "We saw really interesting youth development activities—leadership groups, community service—but it wasn't clear to us how many kids were actually participating in those high-intensity, high-quality activities. Nothing in the way we had actually structured the site visits enabled us to really get at that issue," one evaluator acknowledged.

Evaluators of the initiatives discussed at the conference addressed these concerns by providing extensive training and opportunities for discussion among team members.

Combining Qualitative and Quantitative Research

The Beacons evaluation encompassed:

- Visits to Beacons sites, where evaluators interviewed intervention leaders, practitioners, community members, and participants
- Observation of youth development activities, using a structured protocol
- Focus groups with parents of children at Beacons schools
- Structured debriefings of site observers to identify emerging patterns and gaps in collected data
- Creation of a computerized inventory of qualitative data, with items based on site observers' answers to 200 limited-response questions
- Interviews of long-time participants
- Focus groups with site representatives to learn about new developments, outcomes, challenges, and solutions and to engage these people in helping to rate the quality of specific activities
- "Snapshot surveys" of 7,500 students that collected basic demographic data and information on duration and frequency of participation; students who filled out the survey were invited to participate in short interviews
- Surveys of participants (often paired with interviews), parents, school faculty, and other staff

Using a Two-Tiered Approach to Combine National and Local Evaluations

Increasingly, researchers, program funders, and community collaborators are recognizing the value of research that links evaluation on a national scale with individual, site-specific evaluation. Often, the local evaluations are conducted by or with assistance from community representatives, making them opportunities to build local capacity for self-assessment and reflection. National evaluations also benefit from this two-tiered approach. The local evaluation can become an information conduit, enabling the national study team to collect certain data and to share important cross-site data with each community.

There are many models for two-tiered evaluations. In some cases, the national and local evaluations serve separate purposes. Although the two activities may include communication and information sharing across studies, they operate independently and have different goals. In the Neighborhood and Family Initiative evaluation, for example, the national evaluation is a broad study of the usefulness, viability, and implementation of the initiative's two guiding principles. The local evaluations are autonomous and locally governed; their purpose is to track outcomes and progress toward goals identified by the sites and to give the sites feedback on their achievements.

In other evaluations, the national study is the framework for all research and the local evaluations are primarily components of the larger evaluation. Evaluators of Jobs-Plus, for example, described their study as "a national evaluation in seven sites," supported in each community by local evaluation leaders who are employees of the national evaluation team.

Two-Tiered Evaluation Model

The **Neighborhood and Family Initiative** (NFI) sought comprehensive responses to the needs of children, families, and neighborhoods, grounded in community collaboration and participation. It operated through community foundations in Detroit, Hartford, Memphis, and Milwaukee. The national evaluation was a broad study of the implementation process, strategies, and structures. It focused on the usefulness and viability of NFI's guiding principles for change. The autonomous local evaluations, governed by local providers, tracked outcomes related to site-specific objectives and provided feedback to the community.

Participants described the following challenges to designing and implementing two-tiered evaluations:

Establishing complementary purposes, roles, and relationships for national and local evaluations

The variety of possible approaches for two-tiered evaluations makes it essential that national and local evaluators clearly define their respective goals and work out a relationship that supports both levels of evaluation. In particular, the funder, national and local evaluators, and site-level leaders of the intervention must understand "who's doing what, who's responsible for what, who is liable to whom, and how the information will be shared with the multitude of audiences," summarized one evaluator.

Attempts to clarify evaluation roles and objectives are influenced by:

- **The nature of the initiative itself.** For example, evaluators of the Neighborhood and Family Initiative designed the local evaluations as autonomous studies because the very broad principles of the initiative, and the extreme differences in local context, left the national evaluation without a single theory of change to track across sites.

- **Expectations for what local data analysis might achieve.** Establishing local responsibility for evaluation, instead of centralizing control of research at the national level, can push sites to develop skills in strategic planning, goal setting, data collection, and information feedback and to make an investment in self-evaluation that outlasts the national evaluation. In some cases, this is an explicit objective of the intervention's funder.

- **Varying definitions of what constitutes evaluation.** As one participant observed, the word "evaluation" is used loosely to mean many things: analyses of outcomes against strict performance criteria, broad studies of implementation processes, assessment activities intended to create opportunities for learning and reflection, and assessment of compliance with the specifications of a grant. This can cause confusion and unrealistic expectations between local and national evaluations.

- **The information needs and interests of local and national stakeholders.** Intervention sites may need evaluation data for program management and accountability, while national evaluators want data to inform broader cross-site findings about social change.

It was not pretty at times—trying to make sure the site perspective was there, making sure the [research organization's] perspective was there, the foundation's perspective ... and all of us saying, Okay, we have these critical elements. We have a place we want to go. We have things we want to demonstrate. The sites have their perspective; we have ours. Now how do we hammer this out?

—Sherece West, Program Associate to the Rebuilding Communities Initiative, The Annie E. Casey Foundation

Capturing both shared and unique elements of multi-site initiatives

The stories of individual communities that produce positive outcomes for children and families are extremely valuable. They can be informative and inspirational. They capture the imagination of funders and policy makers, build momentum for local action, and spark debate about specific issues. But they don't necessarily capture the common elements that are essential to all projects within an initiative or produce cross-cutting lessons that apply to other neighborhoods and contexts.

Two-tiered evaluations have an opportunity to try to understand both the common elements and the crucial differences among an initiative's sites. For example, the local evaluation component of the Neighborhood and Family Initiative tracked outcomes related to local objectives. Although the outcomes varied substantially across sites, the national evaluation component looked across sites and identified a theme: While the notion of comprehensive change spurred local collaboratives to think broadly, it did not provide sufficient guidance to help sites do so, often resulting in community-building responses that addressed needs more categorically than comprehensively. From this observation, national evaluators could extract lessons about the guiding role of funders, the capacity of local collaborators to think strategically, and the effects of unequal power among local collaborators.

It's often hard to make cross-site comparisons, however. If local evaluations are free to pursue their own research agendas, they may not produce much comparable information. The extreme diversity of initiatives that tailor change to local context can further limit the applicability of lessons from one site to another. Also, the depth and quality of data collection frequently is uneven across sites. Some sites are more willing or able than others to share relevant, in-depth information, so it is always possible that a cross-site research finding could have been supplemented or contradicted by data that evaluators could not elicit from an unresponsive site—or that experiences at an extra-cooperative site disproportionately influenced cross-site findings.

We're trying to take advantage of the fact we have seven places trying to do something similar but they may do it in different ways, and what can we learn from that. At the same time ... we want to capture some of the [site-specific change] as well.

—Evaluator of the Jobs-Plus initiative

Timing the national and local levels of study.

Local and national evaluations are more likely to produce compatible, mutually useful data if their areas of focus and research activities are integrated in some way. This does not mean that every aspect of the two tiers must follow identical paths, but there should be some shared ground and some process for communicating.

Timing plays a significant role in integrating national and local evaluations. Local evaluations that are initiated long after a national evaluation begins and developed entirely apart from the cross-site research may struggle to gain a place in the data collection, analysis, and feedback loop of the national study. This was the case for the local evaluations of the Neighborhood and Family Initiative. "I'd describe the basic problem as compartmentalization of duties and concerns that never quite merged," recalled evaluator Robert Chaskin. "There was some level of distrust ... at the local level in terms of what evaluation is about and why we should do it, and lack of clarity about what the national cross-site evaluation was to do."

Timing can also influence the allocation of resources to each tier of research. For example, it may make sense to gradually shift some resources from the centralized national evaluation to the local assessments, as local activities and effects expand over time, one evaluator suggested.

Building local trust, support, and capacity for evaluation

Communities often resist evaluation. Their resistance usually is driven by several factors: (1) concern that evaluators will try prematurely to find evidence of transformed families or communities; (2) fear of negative consequences; (3) distrust of evaluators and a belief that the evaluators can directly affect program funding; (4) lack of interest in evaluation, often exacerbated by a lack of funding for local evaluation; (5) lack of faith that the intervention's broad and ambitious goals can be linked to measurable outcomes; or (6) lack of experience or capacity in self-evaluation.

In self-defense, local collaborators often try to control the research. In the Plain Talk evaluation, for example, New Orleans site representatives initially thought that evaluators had the power to expand or cut off the program's funding source. "In the site visits, we were always careful to put our best foot forward. You know—pick the stories we want to tell, pick the stories we don't want them to know anything about," admitted site director Tammi Fleming. Until the site overcame this reaction, "we didn't really get someone to objectively observe our mistakes [so] we could change them in the long or short run to make the program better," she said.

Ethnographers and other researchers who spend a lot of time on site can help allay community fears that research will only reflect the quantifiable effects of change. But the sense that an outsider will be able to see "our dirty laundry," as Fleming described it, still makes communities worry about evaluators who are total strangers to the community and its culture. Participants suggested the following tactics for overcoming suspicion and building local support:

- **Give sites some input** into the selection of the researchers who work most closely with the community. This ensures that the researchers' assumptions about poor communities, about evaluation, and about the role of evaluators in communities are sensitive to the neighborhood in question.

- **Set clear, reasonable guidelines** for which aspects of the evaluation the community can and cannot influence. For instance, community members should be able to provide feedback on evaluation reports but not dictate the interpretation of data.

- **Position the evaluation as a central component** of the intervention, not as something abstract and separate.

- **Present evaluation as a tool all stakeholders can use** to improve their work, not as a punitive or judgmental function. In part, this means understanding and explaining community members' perceptions about why things are a certain way, not just describing successes and failures.

There's a tremendous amount of ambiguity about goals and expectations ... built into the collaboratives themselves. There was also a lack of interest in evaluation on the part of the community foundations, which didn't have much experience with it and pretty much adhered to a philosophy of, 'We'll know [success] when we see it.'

—Evaluator of a multi-site initiative

Technical Assistance Issues

Researchers and funders are beginning to address many of the issues described in this summary by making technical assistance a vital part of evaluations. Assistance to sites may focus on ways to understand and accommodate the evaluation process, how to conduct self-evaluations, how to use evaluation data effectively, or all three purposes. This section describes major technical assistance issues identified by conference participants. The related issues of providing feedback to communities and building local capacity to value data are discussed in a later section.

As more researchers adopt a second role of helping local collaborators participate in evaluations (or at least accommodate technical assistance in their studies), the hard line between evaluation and technical assistance has blurred. The experiences of a few evaluations with technical assistance have shown that researchers can play multiple roles in relation to a community and that the benefits of providing assistance outweigh concerns about tainting researchers' objectivity. The benefits can include stronger relationships among collaborators and the introduction of an independent perspective on the evaluation process.

Participants generally agreed that most evaluations benefit from incorporating some form of technical assistance, although the nature and extent of assistance depend on local needs, available funding, the scope and depth of the evaluation, and the goals of the intervention. In some initiatives, assistance is provided by the evaluators; in others, a separate group of assistance providers works independently of the evaluation. In both cases, the following issues present challenges:

Aligning the assistance with the purpose of the initiative

Technical assistance is most *effective* when it provides concrete methods for addressing specific needs. It is most *useful* to sites when those methods and needs reflect the priorities of the comprehensive initiative. Unfortunately, at the beginning of a new initiative, local collaborators, technical assistance providers, evaluators, and even funders may not know exactly what those priorities are. In this early stage, technical assistance needs to engage stakeholders in discussions that help them convert a vague sense of direction into a clear, unified purpose.

If there was a clearer sense of what the sites wanted to accomplish, the whole technical assistance strategy—the whole issue of ownership—could have been dealt with more easily.

—Technical assistance provider

Differentiating between the goals, strategies, and expectations for technical assistance held by various stakeholders

Although funders, technical assistance providers, and sites rarely discuss with each other their motives for engaging in technical assistance, each player has an interest in what the assistance should accomplish. Differences or conflicts among these expectations can add to the confusion surrounding a new intervention.

A foundation's primary interests in technical assistance are to improve the quality of program implementation and evaluation and to ensure that attempts to produce complex, difficult change get every change they need to succeed. Sites usually want help developing their own capacity to implement or assess an intervention, goals that are related but not limited to improving overall program quality. Evaluators who provide technical assistance want to improve data collection and data quality, which will not necessarily meet the sties' goals of building local capacity for evaluation, although it can. And professional technical assistance providers have an interest in successfully completing the work for which they have been hired—not necessarily in thinking about comprehensive change in the same ways envisioned by the sites and funders.

Site leaders and technical assistance providers may not always understand or be able to meet each others' expectations. For example, the Jobs-Plus intervention initially offered assistance to all of its sites through a centralized team of providers. When this approach failed to give the depth of assistance that the communities wanted, the initiative switched to a network of local, part-time providers who work intensively on site. Similarly, the Neighborhood and Family Initiative's early efforts to provide centralized assistance did not meet the unique interests and needs of the four sites, so it was replaced by site-controlled funds for targeted assistance.

Technical Assistance in Action: The Neighborhood Partners Initiative

Technical assistance helped sites in the Neighborhood Partners Initiative collect data for strategic planning and goal setting, develop target outcomes and measures of success, and document early implementation activities. The assistance providers relied on four techniques:

- **Site-initiated assistance**, with topics and formats selected and managed by each site in order to increase local ownership of assistance activities.
- **Foundation-initiated assistance** on pre-selected strategies and activities that supported the funder's interests in documentation and institutional capacity building. Although this assistance was not completely prescribed, it was strongly influenced by the foundation's overall goals. Some standard assistance was provide to all sites.
- **Cross-site learning initiated by sites**, which allowed sites to define the learning opportunities they wanted to have with colleagues in other sites. The purpose was to challenge sites to take ownership of the initiative.
- **Site participation in managing and coordinating the initiative**. A group of site representatives shared responsibility for making decisions about the technical assistance strategy, evaluation, and other aspects of the initiative.

Using technical assistance to build local capacity for change

Good technical assistance doesn't just tell communities what to do or do it for them, it prepares community members to make their own plans, decisions, and actions. Instead of creating dependence on outside help, technical assistance should help local collaborators recognize when they need help, know where to get it—and, ultimately, outgrow the need for it.

Examples described at the conference include the following:

- Assistance to the Beacons sites, provided by Youth Development Institute, is designed to foster a learning community. Every month, the institute convenes Beacons leaders to discuss key issues. The Fund for the City of New York also links site leaders and staff to specialized training, either by conducting sessions or by making other opportunities available.

- In the Rebuilding Communities Initiative, Metis Associates guided sites through the process of hiring survey coordinators and administrators, created a training manual, and trained survey staff. The five sites conducted their own surveys with ongoing support from Metis.

According to conference participants, much more capacity-building assistance is needed for sites participating in complex interventions, especially those with local evaluations.

Technical assistance shares an objective with the genre of evaluation that recognizes the value of engaging communities in skill building. However, assistance also introduces a confounding variable for research, because if the assistance really does build local capacity it affects the processes and characteristics being evaluated.

> *We have totally redefined technical assistance. We start with very specific problems, so that our credibility and trust is built on our capacity to produce very tangible things that help [sites], based on what they see as their need—not [where] we think they need to be five years from now.*
>
> —Technical assistance provider

The capacity-building issue is not limited to sites, participants noted. Technical assistance providers also should be able to improve their skills and knowledge over the course of an initiative so they can adapt their techniques and strategies to changing local needs for assistance.

Timing activities so that the assistance agenda matches local needs and interests

The beginning of a new social intervention seems like a natural time to begin advising sites on how to produce the changes they seek. But communities aren't always eager for help when they are deep in the throes of creating new partnerships, building relationships, and taking their first steps toward change. Local collaborators may not feel much ownership of the initiative, are unsure of their own roles, do not know exactly what assistance they need, and may feel threatened by outside experts. "Until [site leaders] had an understanding and some measure of ownership over the initiative ... they were not going to step up and participate in a meaningful way in shaping a technical assistance strategy," recalled Bill Traynor, who provided assistance in the Neighborhood Partners Initiative.

Early technical assistance should be simple and concrete; it should be driven by the demands of the initiative and the sites' interests. As the initiative matures into a more complex undertaking, as collaborators begin to understand what specific help they need, and as sites accept ownership of the initiative, assistance can expand to meet new needs.

The Neighborhood Partnership Initiative learned this lesson the hard way. The initial assistance plan was "very complex and overbuilt," Traynor acknowledged, and "the technical assistance team was seen as getting in the way of the initiative." The requirements for coordination and communication were enormous, and the demand for sites' time and attention was excessive. At the end of the first year, an independent assessment of the assistance effort helped the collaborators reconsider their approach and devise a new approach that focused more directly on the sites' specific, first-stage needs. Technical assistance providers stopped trying to analyze and fine-tune everything the groups were doing on a month-to-month basis and gave them more space to experiment with their work. The technical assistance providers and local collaborators worked together to define a technical assistance strategy that met the initiative's own interests.

"We spent a lot of time talking about ... the self-interest of the foundation, the self-interest of the sites, what's really the purpose of the initiative," Traynor said. The result of these conversations was a four-pronged approach that included site-initiated technical assistance, assistance on topics initiated by the foundation, cross-site learning driven by the sites, and site participation in managing and coordinating the initiative.

Clarifying the roles of national evaluators and technical assistance providers

Although the distinction between evaluation and technical assistance has softened, in reality it takes some effort to blend these two endeavors. In the early stages of the Casey Foundation's Mental Health Initiative for Urban Children, for example, the evaluation and technical assistance were completely separate from each other. "The right hand and the left hand were really not coordinating the work. Both [parties] had to change the way we were doing business," explained evaluator Marcela Gutierrez-Mayka. "The technical assistance decided that they couldn't continue to push their expertise on the sites unless they were ready for it." But what made them ready? That's where the evaluation came in.

"We began to look at the results of the evaluation ... dealing with very concrete issues of implementation," Gutierrez-Mayka said. The evaluators replaced long, academic reports with short, concrete analyses of strengths and opportunities for improvement. These became the basis for technical assistance strategies. Collaborators in the sites responded well to the changes, because the new roles provided a clear path to self-improvement. "Four months after this report was produced and the training was delivered, we are seeing already the change in practice—a change that we're going to go back and evaluate and give more feedback on," Gutierrez-Mayka reported.

Complementary research and technical assistance roles are characterized by:

- **Communication** between researchers and assistance providers

- **Unified and seamless data collection** processes and instruments

- **Efforts to avoid confusing sites** with mixed messages and conflicting demands

- **Recognition that assistance is not the same as evaluation**—even when both roles are played by the same people—and that assistance providers are not undercover grant monitors or "snoops" for an evaluation

- **Recognition that sites have the authority to help determine technical assistance** strategies, topics, and activities

Building trust and collaborative relationships among assistance providers and recipients

At the beginning of an intervention, the relationships between sites, funders, assistance providers, and evaluators are tenuous. People do not know each other well enough to trust their partners, share ownership, or feel comfortable risking new roles. Sites typically view the foundation supporting the initiative as a source of funding, not necessarily as a partner, and the assistance team as an extension of the funder's will and interest—or as an agent for the evaluation. For its part, the funder may view intervention sites as communities that need to be pushed and prodded into something more than they are. Efforts to dispel these perceptions can actually exacerbate the problem by making sites suspicious of the motives.

Without trust, it is hard to develop a learning environment. Instead, the technical assistance team and the content of assistance can become the arena where stakeholders fight out their concerns.

Key ingredients for trust include:

- **Time** for collaborators to get to know each other

- **A shared sense of ownership** for crucial research activities, so that neither sites nor assistance providers feel it is being forced on them

- **Opportunities for stakeholders to talk explicitly** about the role and quality of technical assistance and evaluation, which allows them to recognize each other's vulnerabilities and self-interests

Implicitly, by saying assistance is needed, you are saying something's wrong, and you can't say something's wrong without criticizing. [T]hat puts people at an uneven moment in their relationship. What happens in those situations is that people revert to certain kinds of stereotypical behavior ... and they mobilize their organizations to act in organizationally stereotypical ways. The foundations become a bit more arrogant, and the CBOs become a bit more defensive.

—David Hunter, Director of Assessments
Edna McConnell Clark Foundation

Foundations have a major role in supporting activities that build trust. In addition to creating opportunities for dialogue among stakeholders, they can demonstrate that they are prepared to do some of the hard work themselves—and that they are eager partners in change, not just monolithic institutions that can command sites and assistance providers to work together. For example, foundations can show flexibility in timelines, delegate more authority to local collaborators, and change their internal procedures so that promised resources become available more quickly. These kinds of changes helped the Edna McConnell Clark Foundation build

trust among local collaborators and assistance providers involved in the Neighborhood Partners Initiative.

Presenting Evaluation Data in Useful and Compelling Ways

The best efforts to measure change and assist sites with research will not accomplish much if the data don't reach the people charged with promoting, shaping, and implementing change in a format they understand and appreciate. Conference participants discussed this issue in the context of documenting the process of change, providing communities with feedback, promoting data as a tool for local advocacy, and building local capacity to value and use data.

Shared Ownership is Vital

Assistance providers speculate that the Neighborhood Partners Initiative's effort to document the change process faltered because neither the assistance providers nor the sites were invested in the activity. The documentation work asked local leaders to complete information logs and meet frequently with researchers to reflect on their logs and to map the course of the initiative as it evolved. Unsure of how the documentation related to the technical assistance and to the foundation, and therefore uncertain why they should commit to this time-consuming activity, community leaders were leery of speaking candidly with documenters. Although the project did yield some useful information, "We never really were able to create a sense of honest dialogue, or it only began emerging towards the end," one assistance provider said. "There were ... concerns about who was telling what to whom."

Documenting the Change Process

Documentation establishes an historical record of the steps, processes, and interactions associated with a complex initiative. It produces examples and lessons that help sites and other interested parties understand why they succeeded and where they went wrong. It can help researchers identify emerging effects and patterns long before they are clear enough to measure. And it educates foundations and other funders about issues and solutions that are relevant for strategic planning and program monitoring. Based on information gathered by the implementation study of the Neighborhood and Families initiative, for example, the Ford Foundation shifted from a centralized system of technical assistance for sites to a structure that gave communities a stronger voice in designing technical assistance services.

Several of the larger evaluations described at the conference included a documentation component. The Plain Talk evaluation used on-site ethnographers to track what was happening in the sites—to understand the community context, attend workshops, observe meetings, and conduct formal and informal interviews. Although the focus of this activity was to share findings with a national audience, some ethnographers also shared their weekly write-ups with sites.

Similarly, the Neighborhood Partners Initiative tried to use documentation to encourage sites to think strategically about what they were doing. Documenters, who also belonged to the initiative's technical assistance team, were expected to participate in cross-site activities and review locally developed materials. They also met frequently with project directors to analyze what they had learned as the initiative unfolded.

Providing Communities with Feedback

Increasingly, evaluators and other researchers are recognizing the value of giving the communities they study some feedback on what they are learning. The message that feedback gives to communities, as researcher Robert Chaskin summarized, is: *Here's what we're learning about what you have shown us. Here are what these local dynamics are leading to. Here are the tensions in the way priorities are developed. Here are tensions in the levels of local participation. Here's what's playing out when you say you want to achieve these goals.*

Sharing research data with communities and stakeholders has several benefits. Feedback to sites can:

- **Reassure people** about the intent of research, build local trust, and reduce apprehension toward evaluation
- **Establish a local audience for information** about efforts to improve outcomes for children, families, and neighborhoods
- **Provide a vehicle for researchers to expand their interactions with sites** and to have candid discussions with local partners about their own data collection and analysis
- **Offer a reality check for evaluators,** as sites consider whether the findings mesh with their sense of reality
- **Set a short-term agenda for sites** to follow up on problems identified by researchers
- **Help collaborators rethink their actions and plan strategically,** not just explain what they have already accomplished; for example, the evaluation of the Cleveland Community Building Initiative presented sites with baseline information on what the initiative had accomplished and then asked them to consider whether there were any alternative or complementary paths of community change that the initiative could take.

Evaluation feedback pushed the Community Change for Youth Development site in St. Petersburg, Florida to consider improvements in areas it had not addressed. "The report [said], 'You're doing a good job at activities but there are things central to building an infrastructure that you could focus on,'" recalled site coordinator Bufus Gammons. "That gave us a charge [that] we could share with the executive committee." In response, the site leaders created a work program for 320 youth and began to thing about ways to stimulate youth leadership.

Evaluations of the Neighborhood Partners Initiative, Community Change for Youth Development, Cleveland Community Building Initiative, Jobs-Plus, and Neighborhood and Families Initiative all included some form of informal or formal feedback to sites. Researchers from these studies described the following issues and methods:

Feedback should report timely findings on a frequent basis.

Frequent feedback allows sites to take proactive steps toward improvement based on current findings rather than waiting for an annual or final report. Researchers, site leaders, and funders all should be aware of the snapshot effect, however: Although a feedback report captures important information, it represents only one slice of time. By the time the report comes out, the situation may have changed substantially. "[Researchers] may say that we really need to look at our work program and put more

effort in it ... but [in the meantime] that effort could have redoubled or changed or it could have gotten a lot worse," Gammons noted.

The most important thing [about the feedback reports] was it gave a historical perspective. You could read about what had happened in the past, and you could look at where you are, and you could look at the strategic plan.... It really gave you a sense of where you were, where you are, and also where you're going.

—Bufus Gammons

Sites should have periodic opportunities for people to comment on the content, format, and usefulness of the data they receive, and researchers should respond to the comments.

Several researchers described compromises they reached on reporting sensitive topics after listening to site leaders' perspectives. For instance, Community Change for Youth Development evaluators decided to remove a discussion of personnel problems from a widely disseminated site memo but retained the finding in discussions with site leaders and reports to the funder

Reports should include some data on dimensions common to all sites in the initiative.

Although most feedback should focus on site-specific information, site leaders often are eager to know how people in other communities are interpreting their initiative's directive. Cross-site analysis gives sites a broader perspective on shared themes. In the evaluation of community Change for Youth Development, for example, reports that included information on the successes or challenges experienced at other sites motivated individual communities to sustain or improve their own efforts. Conducting the cross-site analysis also helps researchers step back from the sites they work with and regain their objectivity.

Many evaluations do not adequately anticipate the need to share data with sites.

When evaluators do not plan ahead to share data with site leaders, they fail to establish appropriate mechanisms for information sharing and may also fail to allocate adequate resources. As a result, relationships between local stakeholders and evaluators can suffer. This was the case for evaluations of the Plain Talk and Community Change for Youth Development initiatives. From the beginning, the evaluators assumed that since they were conducting a cross-site analysis, their job was to provide findings only for a national audience, according to evaluator Karen Walker. As the evaluation and the intervention progressed, however, relationships deteriorated between the local stakeholders and the evaluators—both the on-site researchers (ethnographers) and the national consultants who collected data from the on-site researchers.

Participants in the intervention felt that they were constantly exposed to the on-site researcher's examination but at the same time excluded from the data loop. The annual evaluation report, based on visits from the national research team, wasn't timely enough to help sites make changes based on the research, recalled senior consultant Bob Penn. In addition, some on-site researchers felt that their views were not adequately reflected in the evaluation findings or communicated to sites.

Evaluators of Community Change for Youth Development responded to this challenge by generating frequent, site-specific feedback memos that focused on

the issues of interest to each site and represented the combined views of local and national researchers. Relationships with the sites (and among evaluators) improved.

Techniques for Providing Feedback

Evaluators of Community Change for Youth Development and Plain Talk suggested the following approaches:

- Target feedback to the specific community—not a broader audience—so documents can include information on sensitive issues
- Refer to the documents as memos, not reports, to make them less threatening.
- Begin each memo by explaining how to use and interpret the data.
- Remind readers that the memos include speculation and preliminary analysis and may draw on knowledge from other sites.
- Include cross-site perspectives to indicate when an activity is typical or unusual, but keep detailed comments about other sites to a minimum.
- Do not include recommendations. Use the documents simply to tell sites what researchers are learning.
- Be prepared to accommodate local privacy interests. For example, Florida's strict sunshine laws mean that any memo might have to be shared with reporters, so researchers marked every page "draft" to protect the site from premature public reporting.

The failure to include resources for feedback in an evaluation design can leave evaluators without the motivation to collect the kinds of data that allow individualized recommendations to sites. The Beacons evaluation, for example, did not include resources for sharing information with individual sites. Data collection focused on cross-site implementation and outcomes, and evaluators did not feel that they had collected enough data about individual sites to indicate how local partners might use evaluation information to improve, according to evaluator Warren.

Understanding and Using Data as an Advocacy Tool

Although data are essential for improving program quality, interventions should not be driven by data but their aspirations for what the community can achieve. "We don't want to do that blindly; we want to be informed," explained Angela Blackwell. "If the information causes us to change directions we would certainly do so, but we are not out here at the will of the data."

In an advocacy context, good data help collaborators focus goals, gain credibility, and become more sophisticated in interactions with the systems they hope to change. "We want to be able to utilize data as one more tool in our advocacy tool box to be able to make points, to gather people to the table, to be able to mirror back to folks that we're making progress so that they will stay on board as we move forward," Blackwell said.

Data-based advocacy uses data to negotiate change and to build partnerships. For instance, when the Urban Strategies Council in Oakland, California, learned that data on school achievement were not publicly disaggregated by race, Blackwell and her partners negotiated with the school district to share the data. This process

initiated positive relationships with the school superintendent and school research department that smoothed the way for later advocacy activities.

Building Local Capacity to Appreciate and Use Data

Because data often are challenging to obtain, analyze, and understand, it is tempting to simply "buy" data capacity by sending experts to sites to do the hard work. This approach fails to build the capacity of residents and community agencies to value information, to gain access to it, to understand what conclusions it supports, and to use it to compare achievements against goals—in short, to promote "social learning [about] progress," as Sharon Milligan put it.

How can the use of data foster new skills in communities? Conference participants gave the following examples:

- In the Oakland example provided by Blackwell, the exercise of "stumbling and fumbling" through data collection and analysis was a growth process for local collaborators. If the Urban Strategies Council had contracted with an expert to obtain the disaggregated data, "We wouldn't have [become] stronger advocates," Blackwell said.

- The reports and feedback memos provided by evaluators to Community Change for Youth Development partners in St. Petersburg, Florida offered a template for communicating findings that site leaders adopted for their own reports. Local leaders thus became more effective in reporting their goals and progress.

- Data feedback to Plain Talk leaders in New Orleans helped them realize that some communities were better positioned to deal with certain goals than others. Leaders developed new priorities, benchmarks, and standards for each community to ensure that they matched local assets. One community focused on schools, another on health care, and another on faith-based services. "We were able to use [data] to change our scope of work," said site director Tammi Fleming.

- Plain Talk data also helped New Orleans partners learn how to formulate their own research questions. "The more information you give people, the better they are able to ... actually participate positively in what's going on," Fleming said.

Until recently, building local capacity to use data was not a priority for most evaluators, in part because the cities and foundations that supported multi-site initiatives rarely required their sites to report many data. Communities had no motive for improving data collection and analysis, and evaluators had little incentive to allocate resources for that purpose.

[T]he ability of the local evaluation to draw real lessons and to feed back into program design ... depends upon the links between the program design people at the foundation and the evaluat[ors]. Are the program design people really interested in what the evaluation is finding out, and do they see themselves as a conduit [for] bringing those lessons back to the local site? [Do] they encourage this sort of lesson learning on the part of the collaboratives?

—Virginia Carlson

Researchers can promote data as a community development tool by providing feedback to sites, as described above; by involving local collaborators in data

collection and analysis; and by disseminating evaluation data broadly.

Involving communities in research

Giving local leaders a chance to comment on research data as they emerge, and involving local individuals and stakeholder groups in data analysis, increases communities' ownership of the research. Although several participants suggested that most research does not adequately involve local participants or build their capacity for research and data use, the Jobs-Plus evaluation offered one example. This study engages local partners as "interpretive partners" in analyzing patterns in the preliminary research data. As evaluator Riccio suggested, part of the challenge is to consider questions such as:

> *What implications can we draw from this information that suggest a way to refine the program? Are we learning about a need that has gone undetected, that we might want to give more attention to? Are people doing some things we didn't realize that we can now capitalize on?*

"Maybe out of that process we'll get some better idea of ... what kind of data could be gotten more routinely," Riccio said. "You know, maybe there's some system for getting administrative records [that] you could track yourselves after the demonstration was over."

Another approach to building local participation, used by the Community Change for Youth Development evaluation, is to establish local evaluation committees of key partners—board members, residents, business leaders, volunteers, and service providers. A committee that involves the same people in thinking about evaluation for the duration of the research can build deep skills among a cross-section of influential people, rather than continually starting over with new leaders. A third approach, used by the Rebuilding Communities Initiative, is to gradually emphasize local self-evaluation during the final years of the evaluation by increasing local responsibility for data.

The barriers to building local capacity for data use include (1) a lack of funding for technical assistance on this topic and (2) lack of time for self-reflection within sites. It is much easier to find support for concrete activities than for building more general skills, participants said. And it is never easy for local collaborators, many of whom are volunteers, to set aside sufficient time to think about research findings and learn what to do with them.

Disseminating evaluation information to a broad audience

Too often, evaluation data end up only in the hands of researchers and program officers—not the community leaders, practitioners, and policy makers on the front lines of change. Even if data do reach these people, they often are not in accessible formats for readers who lack the time to pore through dense reports.

Researchers and funders now realize that evaluation data should be disseminated to a broad cast of local stakeholders—but who, exactly, are those recipients and what information should they receive? Just how wide should local dissemination of reports be? Should the information go only to local project leaders or also to the senior staff? What about the entire staff, the governing board or council, the neighborhood residents? How detailed should reports to these audiences be? Should each audience receive the same report?

Researchers are still struggling to address these questions, and the answers probably depend on the goals and relationships within each initiative.

The Quest for Data Builds Local Capacity

When the Urban Strategies Council started in Oakland in 1986, we felt that we needed to show why poverty was interesting to talk about. We turned immediately to the census data, but when we looked at it we realized it didn't seem to describe our community at all. We thought people would be more interested in infant care, how teenagers were doing, whether poor families were making progress, and how kids were doing in school. The census didn't say much about that. So we asked people about those things, and we ended up with administrative data. The administrative data didn't tell the whole story either, although it got us closer. But we were able to articulate the things that we needed to know.

As we put that data into a report, we were challenged by how to put a spin on it that would create a new conversation. So we looked at the communities where we had concentrated poverty, and we looked at what we thought were some of the effects. That took us to a discussion about possible solutions. One of the first things we looked at was early childhood programs in areas of concentrated poverty, and then at what supports were available for these programs.

Later, the council took on the job of trying to find out if all of the community's agencies were actually serving the same children and families. We took 8,000 students in the public schools and compared them with 19 separate programs. We disaggregated the students by race, ethnicity, language, grade point, language proficiency, and other characteristics, and we grouped the programs by focus—income assistance, prevention, crisis intervention. We could ask, for example, whether an Asian student with low language proficiency and frequent suspensions was more likely to be known to crisis or income programs. As a result of struggling through it ourselves, with support from Metis Associates, we were able to put together a real working group that included all of those agency heads looking at this problem. We were able to discover things and be the ones to put it out there, building confidence in our ability, becoming very important for this process as it went forward. We were ultimately able to put out a report that really drove a whole effort that is still continuing. We were able to engage in systems change.

—From the transcript of Angela Blackwell's featured speech

Lessons for Future Research and Evaluation

From the successes and struggles that they shared, conference participants drew three broad lessons about implementing and measuring social change:

- New roles and relationships are needed for local participants, evaluators, and technical assistance providers.
- The dynamics between funders, evaluations, and communities must be improved.
- Environments and opportunities must be created that support ongoing self-reflection in communities.

Participants also identified new directions for research. This section presents the conclusions that participants reached in each of these areas

Create New Roles and Relationships

All stakeholders should invest time and effort in building effective partnerships.

This will entail efforts to help collaborators understand the benefits of community change and how these benefits relate to their own interests. It will also take efforts to reach consensus on expectations among technical assistance providers and foundations *before* providing assistance to sites. When funders' goals contradict the realities faced by local collaborators, grantees tend to "fake, hide, and dodge" requirements, as one participant put it. This exacerbates trust issues.

Stakeholders will need to foster trust during the intervention planning phase. Trust comes from opportunities to discuss concerns, a shared understanding of partners' interests, recognizable and relevant results, and experiences over time in working with the same set of partners.

Initiatives will need to use assistance providers who have the flexibility, communication skills, and credibility to help diverse partners reach consensus—not just those with expertise in certain content. Evaluators and assistance providers will need to improve their own capacity to work with communities. They will have to become more responsive to local needs and circumstances and better able to give feedback on progress and outcomes.

The individuals involved in implementing initiatives will need to take more responsibility for shaping evaluation and a greater stake in the evaluation process. Attempts to engage these stakeholders should include discussions about the nature and purpose of their activities. Community members' roles in evaluation should be clearly defined and financially supported.

Improve Dynamics between Funders, Evaluators, and Communities

Funders should clearly define goals and expectations for their initiatives and promote candid discussions with evaluators and grantees that allow each to refine their strategies.

Communities do not always know the goals and expectations of the funders that support their interventions. Confusion over these expectations makes it hard to define outcomes or the process by which they will be achieved—two pieces of information that are vital to a coherent evaluation design. Furthermore, community leaders, their evaluators, and funders may not share the same understanding of what an evaluation should measure and how it should unfold in the community.

The lack of clarity for interventions may be caused in part by foundations' reluctance to dictate strategies rather than having communities devise their own solutions. But the confusion over evaluation goals occurs because there is no shared understanding of what constitutes an evaluation, some conference participants suggested. "We're operating in an environment where everything has to be evaluated, and the term is interpreted very differently by different people," said evaluator Darlene Hasselbring. "[Some funders] are expecting agencies to do their own outcome analysis. I've seen RFPs that tell service providers they have to design their own random assignment evaluations."

In that environment, evaluation can come to mean simply compliance with strict performance criteria, rather than a thoughtful examination of process and outcomes. Having some consensus on goals and expectations among funders, evaluators, and initiatives helps to ensure that research provides valuable learning opportunities for all stakeholders, researchers agreed.

This is especially important when the intervention involves technical assistance, an activity that requires local participants to be deeply involved in examining their own progress. "If the foundation has a learning agenda ... that needs to be put on the table," said Prudence Brown, an evaluator and member of the technical assistance team for the Neighborhood Partners Initiative. "There are some sites that just may not want to devote this kind of energy to that kind of learning."

One size does not fit all.

Just as a single approach to social change does not work for all communities, there is no generic approach that works for all relationships between funders, communities, and evaluators. Funders need to be flexible enough to tailor their requirements to the circumstances of individual interventions, so they can remove barriers for communities and their evaluators, participants said. Extending the length of the start-up period, delegating more authority to sites, allocating a mixture of small and large grants with differing expectations, and improving grant distribution procedures so that sites receive funds more quickly are some of the techniques foundations have used to respond to local situations.

Create Environments and Opportunities that Support Ongoing Reflection

Funders, evaluators, and assistance providers all have a responsibility to establish learning communities—local forums for reflection and interaction.

Technical assistance, documentation projects, and two-tiered evaluations that promote local evaluation all offer important learning opportunities, but opportunities are not enough. It takes dedicated funding, consensus on priorities, and a significant time investment by all stakeholders to make these opportunities productive.

Funders and researchers must recognize that the nature of local organizations is to be action-oriented and reactive, rather than reflective.

Evaluations and grant-making practices need to be sensitive to the cultures of local change agents. However, this should not stop researchers and funders from motivating and encouraging site leaders to become more informed, deliberate, and strategic than they might be when responding to daily events.

Documentation, feedback, and dissemination efforts must be improved.

Evaluators, researchers, and funders still have a long way to go to make data available and useful. Information has to reach a wider audience, including local and national change agents, practitioners, policy makers, funders, researchers, advocates, and media. It has to be relevant to the issues that each audience recognizes and able to guide readers to issues that are just emerging. Information has to be delivered in formats that capture attention and stimulate action. It has to support both innovation and improvement, increase understanding, and reduce confusion. And it has to integrate many separate pieces of knowledge, so that each one builds on the last rather than reinventing it.

New Directions for Research

Researchers and evaluators should improve understanding of the following topics:

1. **The connection between neighborhoods and children's development**—in particular, (1) the types of neighborhood interventions that are most promising for strengthening families and improving outcomes for children of all ages; and (2) ways that low-income children can spend their after-school time to develop the knowledge, skills, relationships, and behavior needed for good outcomes

2. **Ways that residents connect** to each other and to community institutions

3. **Concrete methods for building social capital** and for helping individuals in poor communities gain access to social networks

4. **Links between resources and outcomes**, including the level and type of resource needed to achieve specific results and the way in which resources support outcomes

5. **The effect on families of factors outside the neighborhood**, including social networks and economic forces

6. **The factors and mechanisms that link families to neighborhoods**, and how these mechanisms mediate specific outcomes for children and families

Conference panelist Claudia Coulton summarized the views of many participants when she explained, "We want to see better outcomes for families and children, but it's the improvement of the mediating processes that is actually going to get us there.... [W]e need to think, as evaluators, about ... which of these mediating processes are actually being unleashed and are actually responsible for what's occurring in the community."

Appendix A: Conference Agenda

March 11

10 – 10:45 a.m.	Charge to the Conference (Tony Cipollone) Plan for the Day (Cindy Guy)
11 – 12:30 p.m.	Breakout Sessions Neighborhood and Family Initiative Cleveland Community Building Initiative Rebuilding Communities Initiative
12:45 – 2 p.m.	Lunch Keynote Address: Project on Human Development in Chicago Neighborhoods (Felton Earls)
2 – 2:15 p.m.	Break
2:15 – 4:45 p.m.	Panel 1: Neighborhood/Family Connections Robert Halpern, Erickson Institute Theodora Ooms, Family Impact Seminar Margaret Beale Spencer, University of Pennsylvania Margery Turner, Urban Institute *Discussant:* Heather Weiss, Harvard Family Research Project

March 12

9:30 – 9:45 a.m.	Plan for the Day (Michael Grady)
10 – 11:30 a.m.	Breakout Sessions Neighborhood Partners Initiative Jobs-Plus Beacons Initiative Plain Talk and Community Change for Youth Development
12:30 – 1:15 p.m.	Speaker: Angela Blackwell, PolicyLink
1:30 – 3:30 p.m.	Panel 2: Network, Neighbors, and Community Spirit Frank Furstenburg, University of Pennsylvania* James Johnson, University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill William Rohe, University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill *Discussant:* Claudia Coulton, Case Western Reserve University
3:30 – 3:45 p.m.	Closing Remarks (Tony Cipollone)

*Unable to attend; represented during the discussion by Claudia Coulton

Appendix B: Keynote Address by Angela Blackwell

Angela Glover Blackwell is Executive Director of PolicyLink, an institution devoted to advancing the policies and practices that achieve and sustain child and family well-being within strong communities. She is the former Director of the Urban Strategies Council in Oakland, California.

Thank you very much. I have been really pleased to have spent the last couple of days listening and going around to the sessions that I could attend. I'm always frustrated when things are happening at the same time, because you sort of want to go to them all. But the choices that I made have been good ones. It is not often that I get to sit with people who are concerned about the research and evaluation issues. I spend much more time with the practitioners, the funders, and the policy folks. I have always enjoyed those opportunities to sit with people who are thinking about some of the research and evaluation questions, and I don't think we do enough of putting the practitioners in the same room with the people who are gathering the data. Just like yesterday, when I was listening to the speaker, I wanted him to leap forward to the conclusions, I wanted to know what he thought about all of that. But, it didn't stop me from reaching my own conclusions just listening to him. I have always found that when I go out and hear people who are doing research that what they're thinking about has always had some applications to what, a decision we had to make tomorrow, and while the researchers have to go at their own pace, and have to rely on whatever evidence and proof they need before they're ready to publish findings, for people who have to act tomorrow it's an opportunity to set up a program. There's an opportunity to influence a policy direction, there's an opportunity to fund or not fund. It's very useful to hear people who are thinking about the research talk about what they're puzzling over.

What I want to talk about today is community building. I am going to get to the topic that's advertised. I'm going to talk about data, but I wanted to talk about some other things first, because in listening to the conversation I just thought it might be useful to try to bring from the perspective that I've had a chance to gather some of the things that are essential about community building, because I've heard the phrase used a lot. What I'm going to tell you it means isn't necessarily what it means, but I'm going to tell you what I think it means, because there's at least some consistency about the things that I think are important if you buy into that meaning.

The most important thing about community building is to understand that it is an approach, not an agenda. I am often frustrated when I see that people can seem to have it right, they seem to have a real understanding of what community building is, and they're ready to incorporate it and they're doing three things, one of which is community building. Community building I think of as an approach that washes across everything that you do. So that whether you're involved in a substantive agenda having to do with teenage pregnancy, or trying to revitalize a community by focusing on housing, whether you're involved in trying to help people move from welfare to work, whether you're involved in health initiative—there's a community-building approach that you could use to try to achieve the goals that *do* something in addition to achieving the goal that also helps us to be better prepared to achieve the next goal tomorrow.

So, there's a wonderful reason for everybody to think about trying to understand the community building approach no matter what substantive agenda you're involved in. When I say community building, what I'm talking about are things that fit within this definition. There are probably plenty of things outside of it that I would also call community building if you called me on it. But, at least within this definition of continuous self-renewing efforts by residents and professionals to engage in collective

action, and to problem solving, and to enrichment that results in improved lives; new and strengthened assets, relationships, and institutions; and new standards and expectations for life in communities.

Let me go back over that long and convoluted definition. I wish that I could break it down to five or 10 words, but I haven't been able to. But I think each part of what I've said is important. Continuous self-renewing, that is certainly important, because what we're hoping for is that we're building relationships and ways of working that won't end when this project ends but will go on, and deepen, and be a part of the community and be better every time people come back together to work in this way and to work on the next thing, residents and professionals. That it's not residents or professionals—and I hope that we will think of both of those terms as being very broad so that all of the people in the community, and those people who are connected to community, need to be a part of these efforts—it needs to be collective action. We're not coming together just to say that we were all there, but we're coming together to *act* together. Acting based on all our interests and all our understanding makes our action more authentic, more effective. We want these actions to be aimed, yes, at problem solving, but never forgetting about the enrichment piece that we all hear a lot about. We don't just want to focus on problems, we don't just want deficit approaches, we want to incorporate the assets as well. So, problem solving and enrichment, so that when we're working with young people, when we're working with families, we think about the things that are important for our lives and we acknowledge that everybody wants those same things. So, let's make time for culture, let's make time for fun, let's make time for relationship building, so we're enriching lives at the same time that we're focusing on problem solving.

As a result of bringing all of these people together to act collectively, to problem solve, and to enrich, I think the measure of our work always has to be improving lives, that we must never leave that out. We do this to improve lives. But at the same time that we're improving lives we want to strengthen relationships, institutions, and those strengths and assets that were there in the community. Probably one of the most important things that community building does is it creates new standards and expectations for life in the community, whether it has to do with standards for the police department, whether it has to do with our expectations from the schools, whether it has to do with our expectations of each other and our ability to be able to hold each other accountable. All of that is what I mean when I say that we're doing community building, and clearly that is an approach, not an agenda. You've got to wrap it around something. You have to be working on something that you can apply this to. Therefore, it should be everywhere, not isolated.

What's so interesting about community building is it really gets over so many of the divisions that have kept us from being able to really work together—those divisions that have to do with whether we're taking a people-based approach or a place-based approach to problem solving. Clearly, community building requires that we respond to the challenges and issues affecting people within the context of the places where they live, because the only way that we're really going to have sustainable solutions is if the places somehow embody that which is going to help people to move on. We need to stop thinking of our work—whether we're working on health, or education, or employment—as something that we do to, for, or with merely individuals, and then they're gone and the thing that we've achieved is gone with them, so that we educate people and when they leave the education has gone from the community. We get people employed and once they get employed and move on, employment is gone from the community. We need to think of these communities as places that have a continuous, renewing capacity to educate, to make healthy, to employ, so that those things get embedded in the communities so that it's there for the next wave of people who come through.

So, we don't have to worry over whether our strategies are causing people to leave communities. I always think that that's an odd worry. You know, we want to do the best for people in the context of where they live, and if they move on then that's really what we wanted. We wanted them to be able to make choices, and they couldn't make choices unless we improved the place where they live so that they could reasonably choose to stay. But, they can also then reasonably choose to go, and we have a place that supports the next person, or the next group of people as they go through. So, if we're doing things in a community-building fashion, there are a couple of things that we have to pay attention to. There are a *lot* of things that we have to pay attention to. I'm only going to talk about a couple of them because of time—not because I couldn't go on and on.

I want to talk about leadership; the institutional capacity that you need; and capacities that communities need to be able to analyze, own and understand, and utilize data. I picked those three because I don't think we pay enough attention to those three, leadership in particular.

There's nothing more important for increasing the capacity of a community than to increase the capacity of its leadership. Leadership is vital for social change, and I think that very often what happens is that we discount leadership. We say that if a program is successful and it had a wonderful leader then it was because of that wonderful leader, and we really can't look at what the impact was of all those things that we might have thought of as the treatment, or however we want to label it. Very often we assume that we can't replicate what's there because of the unique role of leadership. I think there is a unique role for leadership and we need to pay attention to it. Let's think about some of the things that we know. I'll just talk about some of my friends who I think are extraordinary leaders. Geoff Canada is one of them in New York. He runs the Rheedlen Center for Children and Families, and he's an amazing person. There are a lot of things that are amazing, but one of the things that is essential for the work that he does is he has a broader vision than any vision any foundation could bring to his area of Harlem. What's good about that is that because he has a very big and broad vision that predates a foundation or government or research institution agenda, he knows how to bring that in and to utilize it for some continuous interest and goal in that community. I think it's important to find leadership that had a broad vision before the money or whatever was dangled. If people only come to it because there's this opportunity, this is not the big vision that you need for the continuous self-renewing efforts that we want to have happen in that community.

The next thing that Geoff Canada has is an extraordinary capacity to inspire, and when you're talking about achieving things that haven't been achieved before, you need somebody leading that effort that inspires people to be able to go on in the face of no evidence that going on is going to get us anywhere. But it's only because you go on that you find out where it can take you, and you need leaders who can inspire so that they can bring people in who are doing other things, who have other things that they could do to work on this effort, and to get people who don't see the full picture—and don't necessarily have an experience that allows them to think that this is going to be important—to stick with it.

The next think that Geoff Canada brings is a certain excitement that causes people to invite him places. That's a pretty hard thing to measure, isn't it? But that is so essential for doing a successful project, for doing successful innovation. If people don't invite you places you don't get to hear Dr. Earls, whom I heard yesterday. You've got to get invited so you can meet the people who wouldn't be in your usual circle, so you can make your own connections, not just the connections that your funding partner thinks that you ought to make. You have your bigger vision, a broader vision, and you need the opportunity to be able to find those people who can help you realize it. You need to have leaders

who are running these things who are going to get invited places so they can expand their sense of the possibilities.

Now, I think that probably most of the things I just mentioned are not things that we know how to measure or we think about as being essential, but I want to say to you they are absolutely essential for trying to do a demonstration. You find leaders who have that broad vision, have the capacity to inspire, and have an excitement about them that gets them invited places, why they don't even know they are there. But, when they are there I promise you they will take something away with them that's going to make their project stronger.

I think we need a different kind of leadership to do it the first time than you need to do it the seventh time, and we need to make distinctions between that. To do it the first time, you need somebody who's going to inspire and who's got a big vision, and who's going to go out there and do all of that reconnaissance to try to put it together with bubble gum and glue and anything else they can find. After this has happened several times you need a different kind of leadership, and I have a lot more to say about that.

Let me just move from there, because I have a lot more to say about leadership, to talk about institutional capacity to do collaboration. We all understand that, once we embrace the complexity of the lives and problems of people whose lives we're trying to improve, you have to then work comprehensively, you have to work across differences, you have to work across disciplines, you have to work collaboratively, because no one group can do everything. I don't really think it's possible for one agency to be able to have a truly comprehensive response to what people need, because you may try to work across a lot of areas but you're not going to be good enough, or deep enough, or connected enough to be able to do all of them well.

So you're going to have to collaborate. Collaboration that comes out of that kind of insight is the collaboration that has a chance at working. Just because you tell people you need to collaborate doesn't mean it will work, but if people really understand what they have to do in order to be able to solve the problem in a way that's going to be sustainable, they will come to the need to work with others and to work collaboratively. But it takes a certain kind of institutional capacity to be able to support collaboration, and I'm not sure that we have figured it out yet enough to be able to help people develop that capacity. I think we need to spend a lot more time thinking about it.

Part of that capacity is the capacity to really staff the change process in a service mode, because it's that sense of service that allows all of the partners to feel not very threatened by the fact that you're providing this role. It can't be so much of a serving role that this thing can go wherever it wants. You've got to have a point of view. You've got to have something that you think you're trying to achieve in a certain way. Trying to combine that point of view with that sort of posture of service is part of what this institution has to bring. But it also has to bring a lot of capacity, capacity for new ideas. If you have an institution playing that role they have to be able to get fed the best ideas that are out there, because very often what happens in communities is that ideas from the outside don't catch on because we're dealing with the "not-invented-here syndrome." This institution has to have a way to be able to bring new ideas but introduce them so they don't feel foreign. So, being able to allow institutions to have lots of different individuals who have their hands and their feet in different areas that they could bring back in and translate is very essential.

The institution also has to have the ability to weave together and cross the lines. The institution in local communities has to be able to cross lines of differences. *It has to be able to cross lines of*

differences. You cannot solve the problems in the African-American communities in this country only working with people who are African-American and who happen to live in those neighborhoods. You have to reach out of the neighborhoods, you have to reach out into different disciplines, you have to reach out into different races, you have to reach out into different classes, and the institution has to have within it the ability to do that. They have to have the ability to do that, and there's certain kind of individuals that bring that—but it's not enough just to have individuals. The institution has to have the reputation of being able to do that so when people call on the institution they're prepared for that institution to bring people to the table who you might not be comfortable with, but you feel like that institution is going to make it safe for you. That's a tall order for an institution, to be able to be the convener who could invite in the people who have been fighting, who've been distrustful, who have assumptions about each other, and to create a safe space where the hard work can be done. Safe spaces don't require that we don't deal with tough issues, they don't require that we agree all the time—we could even get angry—but what we have to know is that you are not going to be embarrassed, that you are not going to be singled out as the villain when you come to that place. That's an institutional capacity we need to learn more about.

Another capacity that the institution has to have is to be able to be comfortable with the data. We cannot plan effectively if we don't know what's going on. We have to figure out ways to get people who are working on change in local communities to have a respect for and a comfort with data. I'm not sure that buying data capacity for an entity accomplishes that. The data is challenging, it's often hard to get, it's often not easy to understand, and therefore there's a temptation to bring in people to work with local entities who are comfortable with it, who know how to analyze it, who know where to get it, who have relationships. And I think so many things are possible I would never say that that is not a model that can work, but I think it is a model that usually doesn't work. Because what you really want is for those entities that are going to be there tomorrow to develop a capacity to be able to access this data, to understand this data, to understand what's not there and what's not there in relationship to where they're trying to go.

Let me use a couple of examples from the work that I'm most familiar with to try and make this point. It's the work we did at the Urban Strategies Council. When we first started off trying to do the Urban Strategies Council in 1986, we felt that the first thing we needed to do was to tell a story about why poverty was interesting to talk about in 1986. This is in Oakland, California, where people hadn't really talked about poverty for a long time. When we thought about putting together some data around poverty, we turned immediately to the Census data because there were lay people just trying to think about where you find that kind of data. That's the first thing that came to our minds. When we got the Census data and looked at it, we realized it didn't seem to describe our community at all. The things that we thought about in Oakland that we thought people would be interested in [were] infant help, and how the teenagers were doing, and whether poor families were making progress, and how kids were doing in school. That was the real stuff that people wanted to talk about, and the Census data didn't say much about that.

Because we wanted more and deeper discussions, we asked people about that, and we ended up with administrative data—and that was a good way to get to administrative data, rather than somebody coming in with a package of material for us that included the Census data and the administrative data. We got to the administrative data because it had the conversation we wanted. When we got the administrative data, we found that it didn't much tell the story either, though it got us closer. But then we were able to articulate a whole different set of things that we needed to know that ended putting us

in touch with people who could do what I think they call primary research, and begin to find out some of the things in some specific areas that let us get even a little deeper.

As we got all of that data, which we put together in a report called A Chance for Every Child, we were challenged by how to be able to put a spin on it that would create a new conversation. That was the same time that William Julius Wilson was doing his work on the concentration of poverty. So, we grouped it around concentration. We looked at the Census data as he had, looking at 1970, 1980, looking at the increase in the concentration of poverty. But then we took the communities where we had concentrated poverty, and we looked at what we thought were some of the effects, or at least things that were occurring together. That took us—once we finished that report and starting talking with communities about the data that had come out—to a discussion around, well, if you're trying to develop solutions, how does this play out? One of the first things we looked at was early childhood programs. We looked at early childhood programs in areas of concentrated poverty and tried to look at the kind of supports that were available. We did it with the providers of early childhood development supports and other community people.

All the time that we were doing this, the Urban Strategies Council had something it was trying to accomplish. I think that it was no accident that right prior to coming to the Urban Strategies Council for 10 years I had been a public interest lawyer. I wanted to disclose that because I think it's important to disclose these kinds of things. As we're looking for people to select for projects, if we're looking to see why they were effective, I think very often we don't look back at those kinds of issues. I was an advocate prior to being a public interest lawyer; I had been a community organizer. Everything I had done as an adult had been advocacy work, so when it came to data I never thought that we were going to be data driven. I used to tell the staff, "No matter what people on the outside might say—and I don't mind that they say we're data driven because that gives us a certain amount of credibility—don't *you* ever think that we are. We are not being driven by data. We are driven by our aspirations of what it is we want to achieve for this community." Now, we don't want to do that blindly, we want to be informed. If the information causes us to change directions we would certainly do so, but we are not out here at the will of the data. We are trying to achieve something, and we want to be able to utilize data as one more tool in our advocacy tool box to be able to make points, to gather people to the table, to be able to mirror back to folks that we're making progress so that they will stay on board as we move forward.

As we began to get more into the data, we began to be much more sophisticated as advocates. Our two biggest advocacy projects both had to do with the schools. When we got involved in trying to help all of those people in Oakland who were trying to improve the Oakland public schools, one of the first most shocking things that we found out is that the school achievement data had not been disaggregated by race. It had not been publicly disaggregated by race, although there had been some disaggregation in the research department. I couldn't believe it. I just assumed, when we went to the superintendent's office in 1989 to ask for all the data disaggregated by race, that we would just be told where it was. But it was not that easy. They didn't do it because they thought that it would cause a riot. They thought that if they did disaggregate that data by race and showed the differences between black and white, and other racial differences, it would be a reason for the community to be up in arms in a way that the school district was not prepared to respond to.

So we entered into negotiations. We entered into a series of negotiations with the school district about how to do it, how to be able to present it in a way that would be productive rather than negative. I was really impressed that day about a month to six weeks after the request, when the truck

came up to our office with all of this data, disaggregated by race. I was impressed because having been a lawyer I knew that it could've been a two-year fight trying to get that through discovery. I was impressed that we had gotten to the point where we really were working together, we were working together on something hard and we were pushing the envelope. We had lived up to our end of the bargain, too, in terms of how to be able to put it out responsibly. We came up with lots of different ways to present it. We went over that with the superintendent. But let me tell you what happened in the meantime. We didn't have any particular capacity about data, so we had to bring in experts to help us understand what we were seeing. So, we got smarter. We hadn't had a particular relationship with the research division, and we had to develop one. That turned out to be a wonderful relationship over time as we tried to do other things. It helped us to build a trust relationship with the superintendent—and after all, this is about trying to improve the schools, not trying to get the data. That relationship with the superintendent was absolutely invaluable.

Now, if we had just contracted with someone on the outside to try to get us this disaggregated data by race we could've gotten it, but we couldn't have done the work we were trying to do. We wouldn't have been stronger advocates to try to achieve something. The stumbling and fumbling that we went through was part of an important growth process for us as we went forward. Well, our school work really went through many twists and turns, and there are wonderful stories and there are sad stories, and there are stories today that are really sad stories in terms of where we are with the school district. Let me tell you, we made a lot of progress. The one thing that came out of all that work is that the school district became committed to equity. No matter what you hear about Oakland, trust me on this. The school district is committed to equity. That Ebonics thing that you all heard about—that was about equity. I don't care what you think about what they tried to do, what you have is a school district struggling to look at the children who are the most vulnerable, doing the worst, and trying to come up with creative equity strategies. The school district is doing a lot of struggling, but they're committed to equity, and I know part of that commitment came out of disaggregating that data by race and making it public.

The next thing that we did, and I'm going to go through this real quickly because I want to answer questions if you have any, is we got involved with the schools in looking at the fact that most of the students that the school district was concerned about were known to other programs that were concerned about children who were not doing well. We made that assertion, we just made that assertion at a meeting that we called where we invited the heads of social services, and probation, and health, and the city school district, and the county school district. We called the meeting "The Same Client," and our assertion was that you really are dealing with the same client. At the end of that meeting, what was decided is that people weren't quite sure they wanted us to do a study to be able to determine if it was really true.

The capacity that we had to look at school achievement data did not prepare us for this task. The Urban Strategies Council took on the job of trying to find out if all of these agencies were actually serving the same children and families. We took 8,000 students in the Oakland public schools and compared them with 19 different programs, and we disaggregated the students by race, ethnicity, language, grade point, language proficiency, all kinds of things. We grouped the government programs by income programs, prevention programs, and crisis programs—putting in things like emergency room visits being known to probation and crisis. Things like programs that help teens [were grouped] in prevention, and things like AFDC in income. So, they could ask and answer the question, for example, whether an Asian student with low language proficiency [who was] often suspended was more likely to be known to crisis programs or income programs. It was amazing. We had no capacity to do

it. Metis Associates came in—Richard Pargemon—and helped us do it, spent all of his time there helping us develop it. It was an amazing relationship, but what I want you to know is as a result of struggling through it ourselves with support (and the support always came through us) we were able to put together a real working group that included all of those agency heads looking at this problem. We were able to discover things and be the ones to put it out there, building confidence in our ability, becoming very important for this process as it went forward. We were able ultimately to put out a report that really drove a whole effort that is still going on, to be able to engage in systems change.

I want to end on the data discussion because I think that we need to think about how to measure whether or not we're building capacity in a community to value data, to understand data, to utilize data, and to fit data into a much bigger agenda. Thinking, as we look at all of these programs, how to articulate the value of leadership and measure whether or not we're building it and supporting it, and how to articulate the value of an institutional capacity to be able to support collaboratives, and whether we can measure that. Being able to articulate the role and the value of data as a community commodity that is understood, sought, and utilized is also a very important part of the change process. Thank you.

Appendix C: Keynote Address by Dr. Felton Earls

Felton Earls is a professor of child psychiatry at Harvard Medical School and a professor of human behavior and development at the Harvard School of Public Health. He is Director and Principal Investigator of the Project on Human Development in Chicago Neighborhoods.

It's very nice to be here. I'm going to spend about 25 minutes telling you about the progress the Chicago project is making, and hope that we have about 15 or 20 minutes that is scheduled for dialogue—because, trained as a psychiatrist, I'm really a listener. I'm also a musician, so, again I listen. What I want to tell you about is the evolution of the project up to this point, and talk about theory and analysis and interpretation a bit. I'd like to talk about the limitations of what we're doing, because the limitations are as important as the discoveries are, and then conclude with what I see as the next steps in the work that we're doing.

The project started as a kind of brainstorming session about 1984, 1985, at the Board of the MacArthur Foundation. People like James T. Wilson and Lloyd Olan, and a variety of other sociopolitical scientists, were complaining about the fact that we know bits of the elephant in a way, but nobody has ever studied the whole elephant. When researchers get together, what they're doing is splicing bits and pieces of knowledge together, and you often run into the fact that—since this wasn't a prefabricated puzzle that was chopped into pieces—when you try to fit these pieces of knowledge together they don't fit. Sampling frames are different, measures are different, the investigators' ideology are different. [The Board] wanted to create a single design that asked questions about human development, psychological development, or physical development, as well as context, and do it simultaneously, and in the most integrated fashion that one could sort of do this. There was a sense that you'd be developing a more holistic picture and one that might convey more accuracy, more insight than the pieced-together part.

To give you some sense of a timeline—because I think that it is important that something like this can be held together long enough to pay off—between 1985 and 1990, the discussion simply continued. Nothing happened. There were workshops, meetings of various kinds. Some people were mainly concerned with money, how much money would it take to do something like that, and if you take so much money to do that then what's going to happen to the money for other people. There were very—and this is probably the most difficult thing—there were major problems in getting people to work across disciplines. With all of the rhetoric about interdisciplinary research, we found that most people were in deep wells; they wanted to get out very often, but when it came to language and concepts and so forth, they really weren't prepared to get out.

A lot of people were in and out of that process pretty quickly. The group who stayed at the table were people who represented about 5 to 10 percent of the people who ever came to the table, and for one reason or the other they were the ones who were ready in a way to relieve themselves of their discipline and their training—and, you know, in some cases even shred up their M.D. degrees if somehow that was not compatible with doing what this more integrated, holistic approach required.

Between '91 and '94 we started to work on pilot studies. Once we had a group together there was a question of what kind of, what would you measure. The Justice Department wanted us to measure violence and the Mental Health Department wanted us to measure psychiatric disorder, and the

Educational Department wanted, you know, so it goes like that. What would the input and output be in terms of measures? What we came up with during that period of time was two connected studies. One would be a community study that would study context, and in order to study context you had to sample all people who lived in neighborhoods. You couldn't just sample parents, because in some neighborhoods the majority of the people are not parents, at least they're not parents of young children. Then we were going to do a second study that was a longitudinal study of children growing up in those neighborhoods that we have now characterized from a contextual point of view. Of course, we have to sample parents and children of families in that case. These studies would be woven together as tightly as possible so that you would do a seamless kind of design.

In 1995, after thinking about every large city in the United States as a reservoir for this study—and sort of getting it down to, interestingly, Baltimore, Los Angeles, and Chicago—we chose Chicago, not because the MacArthur Foundation was there but it has demographic features that combine a lot of the ways in which American cities have been and will be. So, there are old neighborhoods, European, African American neighborhoods that are going through change, and there are new immigrant neighborhoods. One of the discoveries that I made in looking at demographics of Chicago was to learn that not only had there been a brisk migration from Mexico and Puerto Rico over the century—really, over a long period of time—but in the 1990s, when we were looking at the Census data, we were seeing (so far as you can trust the Census data) a brisk immigration from Mexico at that period of time as well. So we began to sort of get the image of a city that in the millennium—when our results were really going to matter, 10 years from 1995—we were beginning to get a picture of a city that was black and brown, and that the fertility rate and the migration patterns and the political economy were sort of shaping a unique kind of place. Where minority groups, in combination, would be a majority and the dispersion of white groups, European groups, would make that group in fact a minority.

Now, that hasn't anything to do with power structure, but it's demographics. That changing demographics was something that really did characterize American urban life. So, Chicago in that sense was broadly representative of what was happening if you amalgamated all cities of the United States into one big urban clump.

Between 1995 and now we have been doing a community study and a longitudinal study simultaneously. In the last year or so we have started to produce results from the baseline of this study, which was '95-'96, and the baseline consists of a study of all the neighborhoods in Chicago. So we get a footprint of what was there and a longitudinal study of 6,000 children who were between the ages of birth and age 18. Now, it took a separate sample of about 9,000 people to study 343 neighborhoods.

One part of the work was to representatively sample across all of these neighborhoods and collect data in a uniform way to learn something about neighborhoods. But at the same time, we wanted through this separate sample of families and children to begin to learn something about growth and development, which required another unique sample of 6,000 people. The methods of this study go on from there; we didn't stop at just studying communities from the point of view of the way residents perceived them or behaved in them. We also did extensive videotaping of the physical landscape and social interactions as we could capture them by driving through the neighborhoods. We also have done an extensive survey of key informants or experts in neighborhoods to learn something about stakeholder perceptions to contrast with resident perceptions and so forth. Over the years, this data on communities is going to be combined, and from a research point of view we think it's got about as thick a

description of neighborhoods as exists. The challenge is to analyze it and to make sense out of it, and of course that's going to be going on for a long time.

Let me talk about theory, because in some ways I think that's the most important thing. When we started out, the theory that the sociologists had in our group was the theory of mainly social disorganization, and that basically is the theory of poverty if you really take away the word social disorganization and think of what it means. What it says is that poor communities—for whatever reason—are not able to organize themselves in a way to reach consensual or mutual goals. Disorganization reflects the absence of this organization, if you will. What happens is that other informal organizations, like gangs and illegal economies, at various times fill in what the correct organization or the functional organization would do. We played around with that for a long time and learned to distrust social disorganization theory. It's not that one neighborhood is disorganized and another one is organized. It's differential organization that's the issue here, and by calling a place disorganized you in fact miss the way it is uniquely organized in some ways.

Then we went on to social capital theory and spent a lot of time thinking about the particular aspects of social capital theory, which from Coleman's point of view include roughly three domains. One is the degree to which adults and children in a neighborhood or a school relate to each other. He calls that intergenerational closure. Another one is reciprocity, and that is the exchanges between people who share this organization; the exchanges could be knowledge as well as resources—I mean physical resources, material resources. It could be social support as well. It could even be trust, if you think about it in that way. Then the final characteristic is continuity or stability. If you don't have a baseline of continuity, commitment, stability, then presumably the closure and the reciprocity are not going to work, because they are going to be undermined by this lack of continuity. When you read Coleman you realize that continuity doesn't mean residential stability, which is kind of interesting: There can be a continuity in history and time that doesn't require that people stay exactly the same place. It's like carrying your language, or your attitudes, or your customs to another place but still feeling very connected. Social capital doesn't have to be geographically bounded, that's one message from that.

That was also insufficient in our thinking as we were planning this. We started to read Bandura, who talks about self-efficacy and collective efficacy. In this case, the idea is that there is an action potential. Every organization has to solve problems, and the question is how ready is that organization to be mobilized into an active interface with that problem to solve it. Since our interest was raising children, we began to think beyond social capital to the notion of collective efficacy to say how would people use intergenerational closure, or reciprocity, or continuity to take action. The take-action part or the mobilization part is hard to find in Coleman. It's sort of there, but it's not drawn out as it is in Bandura's theory of efficacy in a way that really makes the measure of action potential explicit. So, the measures that we then designed were measures that took Coleman's theory as far as it went but added this new set of issues about activity. We had to spend a lot of time developing and piloting and making ourselves believe that this measure was reliable and valid. Over time, I think we did that.

Now, we get to some results. The first step into the community was to use existing Census data to characterize the structural and compositional features of 343 neighborhoods in Chicago. Basically that was poverty or wealth, so, we looked at the concentration of affluence as well as the concentration of poverty. Second was race, ethnic composition. Chicago, like America, is segregated, and so there are African-American neighborhoods and Latino neighborhoods and white neighborhoods.

Then there is another way that they're segregated, which is class. We essentially made a grid of race, ethnicity, and class, and were pleased to find that in one place we could fill in most of the cells. So, if you look at African-American neighborhoods, we have plenty of poor African-American neighborhoods, but we also had 37 middle class African-American neighborhoods and 11 upper class. (We call upper class when the mean income gets to be $70,000 to $75,000 and above.) So we could uncouple class and race/ethnicity for African Americans, we could approximate it even for Latinos, and for whites. But, the one big, fat, prominent zero in our cells was that we could not find poor white neighborhoods. Now, we knew that there were poor white families in Chicago, but to the best of our demographic analysis they did not look like they were aggregated or segregated in geographical space; they were spread out. There was a point at which we started to call back our results, because think about the implications of that on child development—a poor family, in a context where there are more resources because there are a greater variety of families, obviously has the benefit of neighbors and libraries and so on.

The issue became this: If you know the structural compositional features in neighborhoods, is that all you really need to know? Because concentrated poverty will explain violence, it will explain substance use, it will explain school dropout, it will explain lots of bad outcomes, adolescent pregnancies, and so forth. We took a gamble and said that we didn't think that structural compositional factors were that important. First of all, they're inaccurate, especially for Latinos. Secondly, they don't tell you anything about mechanisms, they just tell you about who lives there. So if you're interested in other dimensions, then you need to know something about how a neighborhood actually functions. That's where the social capital collective efficacy measures became important. It was at that point that we measured across 300 neighborhoods and 9,000 people those characteristics from the theory that I just mentioned. We were amazed to find out that collective efficacy was a robust predictor of violence and that no structural characteristics that we would put into equations could wash out collective efficacy. Not only had we shown that it's important to measure neighborhood mechanisms, because that then tells you what to intervene on, but it turns out it was even more a powerful predictor than we thought. If you read some of our papers, the equations are really pretty amazing because with 9,000 people you can do a lot of mathematics. What it means is that you can test the strength of this mechanism more powerfully. It's like a dream come true, in a way. We could take marital status, race composition, educational level, household size, point of immigration, where your grandfather and father was born, to look at enculturation effects. Despite all of that, this way in which communities are organized around kids, the readiness to take action [was important].

The questions were, If you saw a child skipping school, do you think people around here would do something about it? If a fire station was about to close, do you think people around here would do something about it? If you saw a kid disrespecting an older person... and it went on like that—different ways in which people in a community perceive each other. This is perception, it's not behavior, attitudes. That perception of the space in which you live becomes this very powerful variable. I think that one very interesting insight of this is that you can move from the objective level of analysis—that is, what do people actually do, what are their characteristics like race, ethnicity, income, and so forth—into this subjective domain of how do people perceive each other. The perceptual measure is as strong if not stronger than the objective measures. That, to me, was really a surprise, because you usually—I guess being a psychiatrist it wasn't that much of a surprise. The point is, I'd never seen perceptual measures work that way, and so it was gratifying to know that subjective states of experience can be precisely measured and then put together with lots of other kinds of data. The way that people perceive the world around them becomes a kind of reality in a way, in terms of it controlling events.

Now, the next thing that we started to do is that once we had each of these neighborhoods outlined, we made a map that had a collective efficacy score for each neighborhood. We got interested in spatial analysis, because this is not random, obviously, and started to ask two kinds of questions. One is that collective efficacy could have different kinds of political valence associated with it. For example, a Latino neighborhood that scored high in collective efficacy might have different properties in it. That is, different values are operating to drive up that collective efficacy than if the neighborhood was primarily white or primarily African American. A score of 3.5 on this test tells you about level, it doesn't tell you about values. We wanted to find out about values, because you could have a neighborhood that was race-exclusive and had very high collective efficacy and low violence within it, but much of what it was doing was circling wagons to keep out people who didn't look like them. You could also have industrious communities—and this is what characterizes a lot of Latino neighborhoods, where people are really working hard to become naturalized, to become citizens of the United States, to do better in this country than they think they could have done in their country of origin. That produces high collective efficacy, and in some African-American neighborhoods there was a very high value on education, particularly in the middle-class neighborhoods. So, people prided themselves in the fact that every child born on this block for the last 20 years has gone to college, for example, and that became a kind of value in a way that represented the action potential of that neighborhood around kids. These people really sent a message out to kids that education is important.

Now, here is what we find from the spatial analysis. The danger about neighborhood research is that you reify the geographic boundaries of a neighborhood. We started out with Census boundaries, understanding that that was an artifact, if you will—it wasn't real, it was something that the Census department did. Also, people give names to geographic units and that is historical, so that if Pilson was a Polish neighborhood up until 1970, 1975, but it's now completely a Mexican/Mexican-American neighborhood, it's still called Pilson. That name has no relevance because the kids in that neighborhood go around drawing Mayan and Aztec murals to make it look like Mexico, but it's still got this name of Pilson. What then really does represent neighborhoods as a functional unit when you're trying to analyze how those units impact on human development?

What we're finding is that neighborhoods are embedded in larger regimes, and so the notion of a school district or a police district actually fits better with political economy definitions than neighborhoods do with human development concerns. When you look at the regimes, what you find out is that a neighborhood that had low collective efficacy but is in the *regime* of high collective efficacy benefits from that. On the other hand, a neighborhood that had high collective efficacy but was in a regime of low collective efficacy is taxed. The spatial analysis, I think, reveals that in important ways, and we have some publications that are coming out with interesting maps that show this.

The interesting thing is that this breaks down by race/ethnicity. The neighborhoods that tend to be low collective efficacy in a regime of high collective efficacy are white. So, here is a neighborhood that's not functioning very well, but it's benefiting from other neighborhoods around it—and guess what, the neighborhoods of high collective efficacy in regimes of low collective efficacy are black, which means that they're being taxed. So, if you project this into a moving picture, a dynamic picture, what you see is vulnerability in the black neighborhoods that are hanging on to staying in the city and raising kids in that neighborhood, compared to these white neighborhoods that have a second chance in a way, or the kids in those neighborhoods have a second chance because of the surrounding factors. That's about as far as we have gotten.

Let me tell you about the limitations, some of which I've talked about. One is that we're still not clear about the unit of analysis, so there's Census tract and [neighborhood] names and so forth, and so on. But there are also block groups. And the within-neighborhood variation is very large in all of these cases. The greatest statistical challenge we've had is how to overcome within-neighborhood variation in order to pick up between-neighborhood variation. Do you understand what I mean? You look between neighborhoods, and you look at real estate value and you say, Now, there really is something different about these two neighborhoods. But when you look microscopically, person by person, the within variation is so much from the low real estate to the high real estate neighborhood that you almost say, Well, why doesn't everybody just move in Robert Taylor and save some rent? It's obvious that there are between differences, but overcoming this within problem has really been extraordinary. I think we've worked it out, but it's still a problem. At the block group level you can find very interesting effects that wash out at the larger level. For example, public housing; some neighborhoods have a big public housing complex like Henry Horner, but it's embedded in a larger neighborhood. But that public housing represents a unique ecological niche, and it would be confusing to include growing up in the public housing with growing up around the block from public housing.

The second thing is that we are aggregating—it's like voting, you know, in a democracy—just adding up responses that people give us, and that's one way of doing social science. There are other ways of doing social science that are much harder to do but might be more valid to do, and I'm going to get to that.

A third thing is that this project landed, it parachuted on Chicago, and I'm a little embarrassed to say that in front of people like you but the truth is that we made up our minds that we wanted to do this big project. We then designed it a little bit and looked for a place to do it, and then we sent the helicopters in and landed our research assistants, and they started to collect data. Now, we realize that that didn't work. There was a lot of resistance to getting the study off the ground and launched, and we had to back up, pull people back in and do about 18 months of work to make ourselves legitimate. In the process of making ourselves legitimate, I think we were all transformed. We came out being a different kind of researchers and different kind of people than we were before. But that element of participation in the research is one that we still haven't quite figured out how to do and do well. We realize that its something rich and important; in doing it, that's the way we came out of this process. But in terms of how to do it when I write a grant proposal to NIH or someplace like that....

So, the next steps. The first step is that now that we understand the way communities work—at least just roughly—we want to link that to growth trajectories of children in a longitudinal setting. One way of looking at this is to take reading scores. We think that in some neighborhoods you'll have reading scores that look like this—they sort of rise up to third grade and then they get flat. In other neighborhoods you have reading scores that continue to go up after third grade, and in other neighborhoods you have not just flat at the third grade but dipping at the third grade. You can say the same thing for propensity for drug use, for propensity for anti-social behavior. There's a growth function on behavior and skills that are, we think, neighborhood-specific. Now that we have this community setting, we're going to link it to these growth curves.

The second thing is that the field has been turned on its head a little bit in the last 10 years by the profound knowledge about how health is affected by socioeconomic status, and it's just being reproduced all over the place. When you can control for everything else—access to health care, et cetera—SES effects on mortality, on morbidity, on school achievement, and so forth are profound. We live in a tightly parochial civilization where where you stand in the hierarchy is translated rather

directly into well-being a number of years later. We have to integrate that into our theory of thinking: What is it about social class that gets under a person's skin? We're beginning to think developmentally about this, to look at prenatal care, how social class affects prenatal care, how it affects cigarette smoking and risk behavior, and so forth. We're going to do that anyway in some ways, but now that it's sort of linked to lifelong risks we're learning that there's a developmental programming that may be going on early in life that sets you into your social class self-constraints. And you're not going to move very much once you're on that trajectory. It's kind of an interesting idea, and it opens a side of life to ponder.

Then the final thing, and I want to stop on this, is deliberation. The contrast to aggregated approaches in a democracy are deliberative approaches. One way we make decisions is by having two people who have different points of view, a Republican and a Democrat, talk it out. The sum of that is not one person voted this way and another person voted that way, it's the transformation that took place in the act of a conversation, in the act of a discussion. That happens to us all the time—we go into a situation with one point of view and we come out, after having shared our point of view with somebody else's point of view, in a very different way. Yet in social science we don't have very good ways of capturing deliberative processes, so we always fall back on this aggregation way. And with statistics you can do wonders with piles of numbers, but it may not be getting at the most essential ingredient that works—that is relevant, I think, to a word that you have in your title: neighborhood transformation.

The final statement, the very final statement I want to make is that in this whole process I think we have shifted from what I would call normative academic science to something else. I have to be careful about what I call something else, but it's critical, it's transformative. The way we look at and interpret our data is changing, our expectations of the people who work with us are changing, and I think that in the process of that that we're actually getting to a kind of science that says the purpose is the transforming of society, not to aggregate data and somehow explain things, if you will. That's the way I was taught to be a social scientist—you come up with a model, you test a model, then that model then explains why the world is like it is. That's not what we're doing. I think we really are trying to use our framework to engage citizens and stakeholders in a way that transforms the world. Thank you.

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